

# CINEFANTASTIQUE

April

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## GEORGE LUCAS STAR WARS MOGUL



STAR WARS I:  
THE PHANTOM EMPIRE

*George Lucas*

THE MATRIX  
CARRIE II  
WING COMMANDER  
THE MOVIE

Volume 31 Number 4



THE 75 MOST POWERFUL IN SCIENCE FICTION



# CINEFANTASTIQUE

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# THE REVIEW OF HORROR FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, YOUR GENRE NEWS MONTHLY

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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

APRIL 1999

Here at *Cinefantastique*, we don't report box office figures. Once upon a time, this would not have been so remarkable; after all, it wasn't long ago that only the Hollywood trade papers, *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*, printed this information, which is of vital interest only to people in the business. Over the last decade, however, practically every newspaper, magazine, and television show that covers the film industry has adopted the practice of printing the weekend box office of at least the top ten films, and Hollywood itself has encouraged this by using these figures as part of the promotional blitz (e.g., "the number one movie in America!").

Unfortunately, financial success and artistic accomplishment seldom go hand in hand. This equation is complicated by the fact that success is determined not merely by the box office grosses but by the profitability compared to the budget. This means that two films can be seen and enjoyed by the same number of people, but one can be a hit and the other a bomb, depending on how much they cost to make.

Should any of this affect what tickets you buy and which films you enjoy? Obviously not, and that's why we don't track the box office performance of genre films on a regular basis. However, the sad fact is that success breeds similarity: when something is a hit, whether or not it is any good, more of the same will follow, whereas a good film that performs poorly will have few if any follow-ups.

That's why, once a year, we do acknowledge the hits and misses of the previous year in our annual listing of the Top People in Science-Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Films. Not all the people who rank made great films last year (although many did); rather, their films earned the kind of money that gives them the clout to make more movies. In this context, mentioning box office figures is necessary to explain a particular ranking. Nothing succeeds like success, and this information is a good indicator of what the genre's future will be.

*Steve Biodrowski*



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## VIDEOGAME SUPERSTARS

### EXISTENZ (Dimension)

Set in the near future, the new film from writer-director David Cronenberg, details a world where video game designers are superstars and players can log on directly through a socket in their spinal cord. Jennifer Jason Lee (seen at right) stars as a designer who must enter her own game when her life is threatened. Jude Law, Ian Holm, and Willem Dafoe co-star. Independently financed, the film was picked up for U.S. distribution by Miramax. Despite the obvious art house aspirations, the company handed distribution chores to Dimension, its genre subsidiary.

April 23



### BABY GENIUSES (Columbia)

March 12

This film has been jumping back and forth on the release schedule since last April. Most recently, it was pushed back from January to March 26, before Columbia finally settled on March 12. SEE CFQ 31:1-2

### DOUG'S FIRST MOVIE (Disney)

March 26

This feature-length version of the animated television show was originally slated to go direct-to-video, but then Disney saw the box office returns go through the roof for Paramount's THE RUG RATS MOVIE, another TV cartoon-turned-film.



### IDLE HANDS (Columbia)

April 23

The SCREAM-teen terror cycle is already showing signs of waning. Not only were the box office grosses going down, but already the inevitable spoofs are starting to show up. To that end Columbia offers this "gruesome comedy-horror film" about what happens when the devil possesses the right hand of a clueless slacker (played by Devon Sawa, 2nd from right). Roger Corman-graduate Rodman Flender directed, from a script by Terri Hughes & Ron Milbauer.

### THE MATRIX (WB)

April 2

This big-budget science-fiction effort, produced by Joel Silver and starring Keanu Reeves, jumping back and forth between February and the Summer and finally landing somewhere in between. SEE PAGE 18

### MIGHTY PEKING MAN (Rolling Thunder)

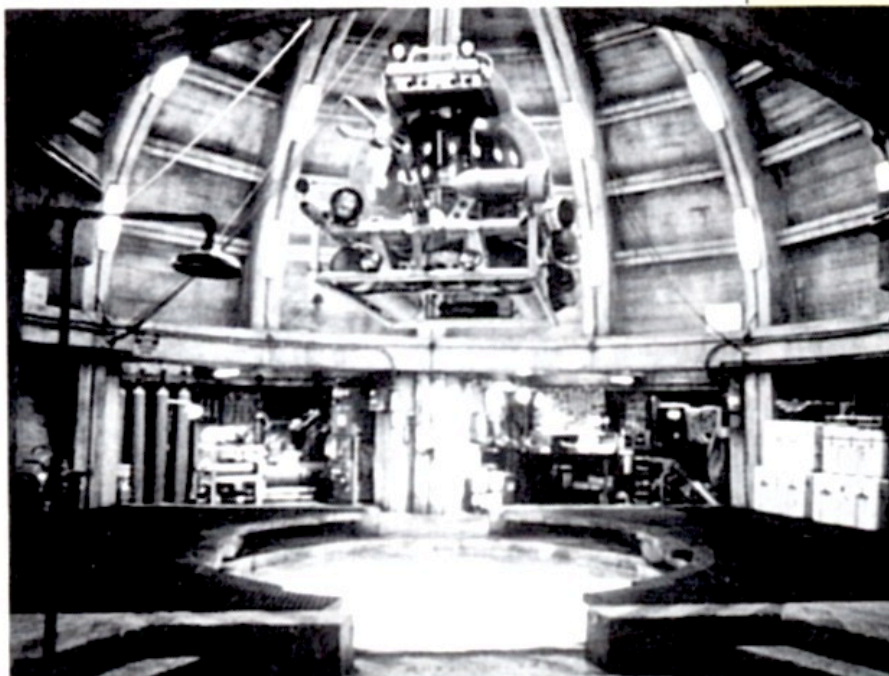
April (midnight)

Quentin Tarantino's Rolling Thunder and Cowboy Booking International (the combo that brought us Lucio Fulci's THE BEYOND last summer) team up again to release this 1977 Hong Kong production from the Shaw Brothers, which will play a series of midnight bookings across the country. The KING KONG-type story follows

# RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson  
(unless otherwise noted)



a team of explorers who discover a giant ape "as big as a mountain" in the Himalayas. The ape is brought back to civilization as a carnival sideshow attraction, but (of course) breaks free and goes on a rampage.

### THE RAGE: CARRIE 2 (UA) March 12

This film was almost set to open on January 15—until United Artists saw the box office receipts for HALLOWEEN H20 and decided they had another potential teen terror summer blockbuster on their hands. Then, after pushing the debut back to the Fourth of July, they changed their mind again, because SUPERNOVA had been moved from its Spring debut, leaving an opening in the studio's release schedule. Despite the title, don't expect to see Sissy Spacek return in this sequel to the teen-terror hit of 1976. Instead, Carrie White's telekinetic powers have been genetically inherited by another member of the family, Rachel (Emily Bergl). Amy Irving reprises her role from the original. Katt Shea directed, from a script by Rafael Moreu. SEE PAGE 14

### TALOS, THE MUMMY (Dimension)

April 2

Director Russell Mulcahy's \$10-million homage to Hammer films and Ray Harryhausen beats Universal's remake to American screens, courtesy of Miramax. Jason Scott Lee heads a cast that includes Lysette Anthony (DARK SHADOWS), Honor Blackman (GOLDFINGER), Shelly Duval (THE SHINING), and Christopher Lee (Hammer's first and best THE MUMMY). This revised take on the classic monster—scripted by Mulcahy, Keith Williams and John Esposito—includes many familiar elements; however, the threat is no longer a bandaged corpse but the bandages themselves—an evil force capable of assuming many different forms, including a humanoid juggernaut reminiscent of Lee's powerhouse Mummy. SEE PAGE 16

### THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR (Columbia)

April 9

Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin, the duo responsible for last summer's overhyped mess GODZILLA, executive produced this adaptation of a German television series from the '70s, about a business tycoon (Armin Mueller-Stahl) leading a double life: one in the contemporary, real world; the other in a technologically-created 1937. SEE PAGE 10

### WING COMMANDER (Fox)

T.B.D.

Chris Roberts, creator of the Wing Commander video games, directs the film version, starring Freddie Prinze, Jr., and Saffron Burrows. The STAR WAR-type story, based on the first game, follows a young pilot fresh from the Academy, fighting to repel an alien invasion. SEE PAGE 12

Anthony Montesano

## THE LOWER DEPTHS

### DEEP BLUE SEA (WB)

It was only last year that NBC showed us the danger of genetically-enhanced sharks in PETER BENCHLEY'S CREATURE, but

those mad scientists never learn their lesson, do they? Now, director Renny Harlin navigates similarly treacherous waters in this film, which details what can go wrong when sharks are bred to have a level of intelligence matching that of dolphins, while still retaining their aggressive instincts. Starring are Stellan Skarsgard and Samuel Jackson (who you think would avoid ocean-going science-fiction after SPHERE). The script was by Duncan Kennedy and John Zinman. The trailer amusingly identifies Harlin as "the director of DIE HARD 2 and CLIFFHANGER." Now, why didn't they mention CUT-THROAT ISLAND?

May 14



# HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

## TERMINATOR 2 3-D

*The virtual adventure reaches Universal Studios, Hollywood.*

by Frank Barron

Hailed as one of the world's most advanced film-based attractions, TERMINATOR 2 3-D, created by Oscar-winner James Cameron, brings its high-tech, big-bang version of virtual adventure to Universal Studios Hollywood this spring. TERMINATOR 2 3-D combines live-action stunts with sophisticated digital imaging from Digital Domain, projected on a 3-D screen to achieve its visceral, immersive effect. The 12-minute film, which picks up where the story of TERMINATOR 2 left off, was co-directed by Cameron and Oscar-winning effects supervisors Stan Winston and John Bruno.

"We wanted to do something spectacular," said Cameron. "There's an enhanced sense of reality that comes from the high-resolution 65mm film format we chose, mixed with the illusion of depth offered by 3-D."

"The payoff for this presentation is double," added Winston. "This is the continuation of an epic, and it's in 3-D. You may know the saga, but you've never experienced it like this."

The all new adventure, featuring the cast from TERMINATOR 2, takes its cue from the blockbuster sequel but features all original footage filmed specifically for the attraction. Starting in the present, the story sends Arnold



Arnold Schwarzenegger and Edward Furlong reprise their TERMINATOR 2 roles in the theme park attraction, which incorporates live stunts in the theatre.

Schwarzenegger's Terminator and Edward Furlong on a time travel journey to Los Angeles 2029, a world policed by cyborgs controlled by sentient corporate behemoth, Skynet. To save humanity from total destruction, the duo takes on Skynet's doomsday complex and its army of killing machines, including the all-new, fearsome T-1,000,000.

The adventure begins when guests enter Cyberdyne Systems' newly constructed headquarters.

Interlocking three-dimensional images and digital composite computer graphics are projected onto three massive 23-by-50-foot screens. Recreating the dark futuristic world glimpsed in the TERMINATOR features, the attraction takes the audience through an extraordinarily fluid mix of state-of-the-art technologies, immersing guests in a sensory encounter that blurs the lines of reality and fantasy. Spectacular stunt work abounds. In one key sequence, a 1500-pound Harley Davidson "Fat Boy" motorcycle explodes off the screen, roaring onto the theater's stage. The stunt requires split-second timing and merges stunt performers with on-screen special effects.

TERMINATOR 2 3-D was produced by Digital Domain, Inc., the Venice, California-based visual effects company owned by Cameron and Winston, along with Scott Ross (former head of Industrial Light and Magic). The attraction was originally introduced to the public at Universal Florida Studios in Orlando, where it immediately became the park's number one attraction. □

## Obituaries

### Hurd Hatfield

Garbo called him "that cruel young man," but five generations of movie-goers remember him as the title character in MGM's 1945 classic THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY, which remains the definitive adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel. Hatfield passed away quietly in his sleep early on Christmas morning. He had been the guest of honor at a dinner the night before, in great spirits while regaling one and all with stories of Hollywood. It seems almost incredible that the actor who portrayed the ageless Dorian Gray died at the age of 80.

Hatfield once told me, "Sometimes, I wish I'd never made that movie. While it gave me an international name, it typecast me and limited my roles in film." Hatfield also appeared in MICKEY ONE, EL CID, and KING OF KINGS, as well as several Broadway stage plays. In over 100 TV appearances, he returned to the Dorian Gray persona twice, first in ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS and again in THE WILD, WILD WEST.

David Del Valle

### David Manners

David Manners was convinced he would live to be 100, and he very nearly made it, passing away at the age of 97 in Santa Barbara. The actor will forever be remembered for his roles in four of Universal's classic horror films: DRACULA (1931), THE MUMMY (1932), THE BLACK CAT (1934) and THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD (1935). His other films include THE DEATH KISS (1933), co-starring Bela Lugosi and Edward Von Sloan, and THE MOONSTONE (1934). Manners left the business in 1936 and moved to the southwest, where he opened a guest ranch for celebrities who wanted privacy. There he remained until the death of his longtime companion brought him back to California.

In the years before his death, Manners loathed talking about his films and refused to pen his memoirs of '30s Hollywood. He would discuss Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi in one or two-sentence remarks, and questioned the sanity of anyone who cared to know more. As he told /more on next page

## Short Notes

Tommy Lee Jones and Clint Eastwood will co-pilot the space shuttle in SPACE COWBOYS. Eastwood will direct the film, about aging astronauts pressed back into service because their experience is vital to an important mission. ☺ Brendan Fraser is in talks to play the lead in MONKEY BONES, Henry Selick's combo of live action and stop-motion (see CFQ 31:1-2) about a cartoonist who winds up in a coma after an auto accident and finds himself trapped inside a strange netherworld called Dark Town. ☺ Wim Wenders will executive produce the indie pic NOW THAT I'VE FOUND YOU. The script by David Hubbard is about the soul of a boy trapped in limbo because he was the last person to die before the change of the millennium. Nick Castle will direct. ☺ THE END OF DAYS, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, apparently set a record for the largest completion bond ever awarded to an independently financed film: International Film Guarantors guaranteed the pic to the tune of \$100-million. □



# STUART LITTLE

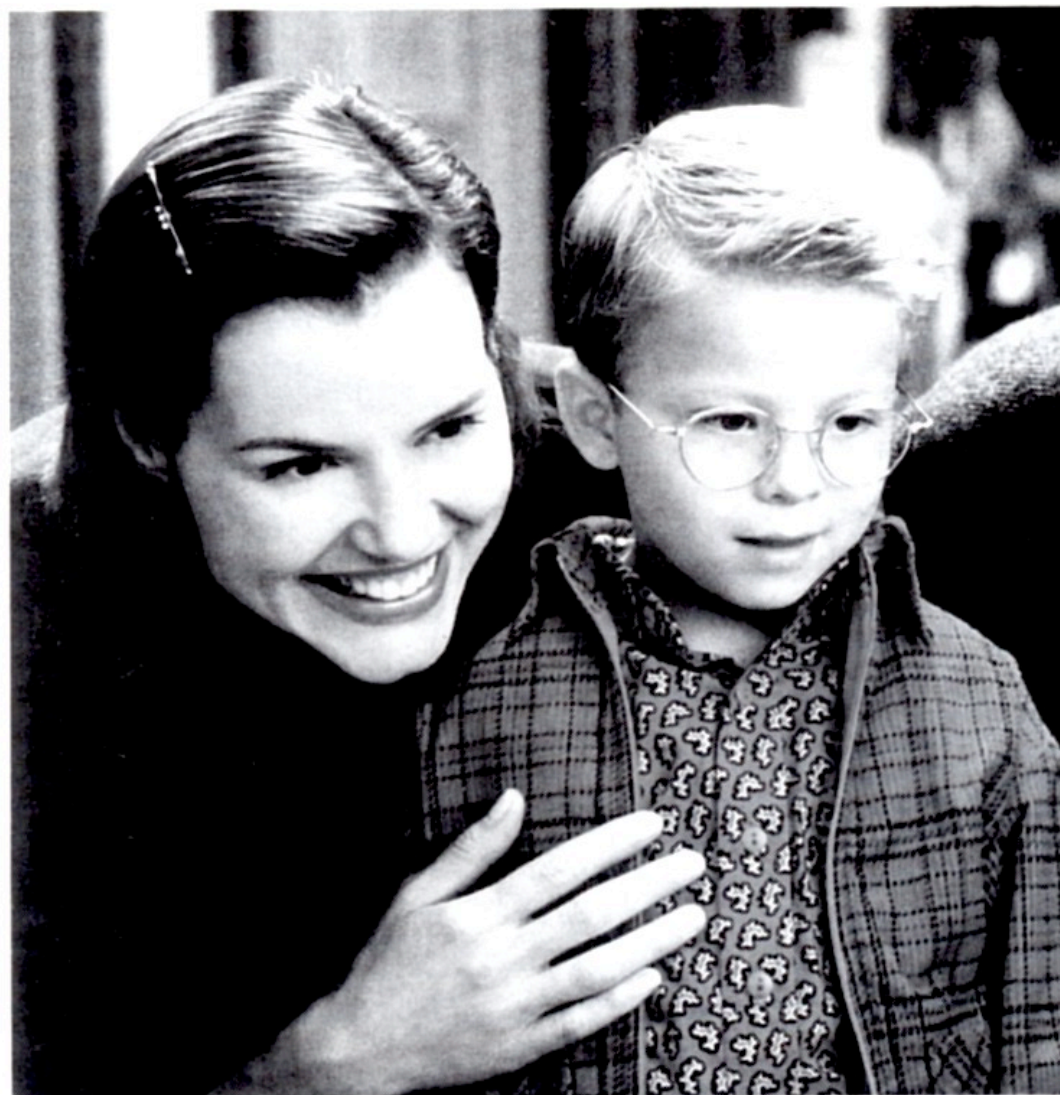
*E.B. White's children's classic gets the high-tech Hollywood treatment.*

by Mitch Persons

Upon finishing work on DreamWorks SKG's *MOUSE HUNT*, animal stunt coordinator Boone Narr predicted that "mice will be *the* pets of 1998." Even though this prediction didn't quite come to pass, *MOUSE HUNT*—the story of an individualistic little mouse who drives his would-be tormenters (Nathan Lane and Lee Evans) to the brink of nervous breakdowns—seems to have inspired the making of another movie about a plucky *Mus musculus*, Columbia Pictures' *STUART LITTLE*.

Based on the classic 1945 children's book by E. B. White, the screenplay by Gregory J. Brooker and Manoj Night Shyamalan tells the tale of Stuart, a clever, anthropomorphic mouse, born into a family of humans, who goes out into the world to seek his fortune and to find his one true love. The family-oriented film, a combination of live action, animatronics, and computer-generated animation, is being produced by Red Wagon Production's Douglas Wick, and directed by Rob Minkoff (of *THE LION KING*). CGI will be supplied by Sony Pictures Imageworks (under the legendary John Dykstra), animatronics by Patrick Tatopoulos, and animal training by *MOUSE HUNT*'s Narr.

Starring as Stuart's family are Geena Davis as Mrs. Little, Hugh



Geena Davis and Jonathan Lipnicki star as the human family who adopt the titular character in *STUART LITTLE*, an anthropomorphized, talking mouse.

Laurie (*SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*, *THE BORROWERS*) as Mr. Little, and eight-year-old Jonathan Lipnicki (*JERRY MAGUIRE*) as Stuart's brother, George. Michael J. Fox will be providing the voice of Stuart, and Gene Wilder vocalizes the part of the movie's villain,

Snowbell the cat.

"There will be some changes from the novel," said *STUART LITTLE*'s unit publicist, Claire Raskind. "For one thing, in White's story, Stuart is actually born into the Little family. Here, he will be adopted. A high point in the book is a sailboat race that takes place in the pond in New York's Central Park. Stuart races his miniature schooner, *The Wasp*, against a sloop called *The Lillian B. Womrath*. The book has Stuart bravely helming *The Wasp* alone. In the film he is aided by the support of his family, who watch the race from the edge of the pond, and cheer him on.

"Also, the entire last third of the White's tale is devoted to the beginning of Stuart's search for Margalo, a beautiful bird whom Stuart loves. There's no Margalo in the film, but the producers do promise an ending that will equal the pathos and charm that White originally came up with."

Columbia plans to release *STUART LITTLE* in December. □

continued from previous page

me, when I had the opportunity to visit him during his retirement a few years ago, "Those films were so long ago and such a small part of my life." **David Del Valle**

## Fredric Myrow

The 59-year-old composer died in January. During a career that included symphonic compositions and a stage musical, he also supplied scores for such films as John Boorman's *LEO THE LAST*, *SOYLENT GREEN*, *SCARECROW*, and *PHANTASM*. **Jay Stevenson**

## Don Taylor

The 78-year old actor-turned-director passed away at the age of 78. Taylor gave Elizabeth Taylor her first screen kiss in MGM's 1951 *FATHER OF THE BRIDE*, but he is known to genre fans for directing *ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES*, *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU*, *DAMIEN: THE OMEN II*, and *THE FINAL CONFLICT*. He is survived by his wife, actress Hazel Court (*MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH*). **David Del Valle**

## SUSPENDED EXHIBITION

In our recent special double issue featuring the history of stop-motion (#31:1-2), we devoted a special, supplementary section to *Suspended Animation*, a touring exhibition of stop-motion props and puppets that was supposed to debut in the Main Art Gallery on the campus of the California State University at Fullerton. Shortly after the issue hit the stands, however, Chris Padilla, the organizer of the event, called to inform us that the exhibition's debut had been canceled. Padilla blamed the last-minute cancellation on deadline problems, saying that many of the promised exhibits had not arrived in time to be ready for the opening. Putting the best face on the situation, Padilla insisted that the cancellation was really more of a "delay" that, in the end, would be for the best, allowing more time to fine-tune the details of the exhibition, which he insists will still take place at some time in the near future. □

## Production Starts



## BOND 19

Shouldn't that be "Bond, James Bond, 19"? Oh well, the 19th adventure in the United Artists series will probably adopt the title *THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH*. Filming commenced earlier this year, with Pierce Brosnan reprising his role as 007. Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli again produce. Michael Apted (*TOMORROW NEVER DIES*) returns as director, working from a script by Neal Purvis and Robert Wade. Denise Richards (*STARSHIP TROOPERS*) and Sophie Marceau co-star. John Cleese plays R, an accident prone assistant to Desmond Llewelyn's Q, who may be making his last appearance in a Bond film; rumor has it that Cleese's character will replace him in the next film.

## THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

William Malone directs this remake of the fondly remembered William Castle film. No word yet on whether the update will include the "Emergo" gimmick of the original. And who could possibly replace Vincent Price?



# PRINCESS MONONOKE

**Neil Gaiman adapts anime masterpiece for U.S. viewers.**

PREVIEW BY PAULA VITARIS

**T**wo years ago, Disney Studios inked a deal with Japan's Studio Ghibli to distribute eight works by anime master Hayao Miyazaki. Seven titles will be released directly to tape and laser disc by Buena Vista Home Entertainment (with dubbed dialogue tracks on video and dual dialogue tracks on laser). The eighth film, *PRINCESS MONONOKE*, opens in theaters this summer, courtesy of Disney-owned Miramax.

Written and directed by Miyazaki, *PRINCESS MONONOKE* is not only Japan's most expensive animated movie (\$20 million) but also that country's highest-grossing film ever, bringing in more than \$160 million, beating out even *TITANIC*. It should prove to be a highlight of this summer's movie season. A sweeping and mythic saga set in the Northern forests of Muromachi Era (1338-1573) Japan, the film depicts a society on the verge of major change. The story immediately plunges the viewer into the middle of a desperate battle: a village is attacked by a boar driven by pain and insanity to take on the form of a Tataru Gami, a huge monster covered with black snakes. Young Prince Ashitaka kills the monster, but his arm is badly wounded, absorbing the monster's curse. To heal his wound

he travels west, arriving eventually at the periphery of a great forest, where he encounters the iron-working community of Tataru Ba, set on an island fortress. The ambitions of the founder of Tataru Ba, Lady Eboshi, have put her into an unrelenting conflict with the forest's creatures, particularly the great wolf Moro and her human foster daughter, San, the Princess of the title (Mononoke has been loosely translated as "spirit" or "ghost"). Ashitaka is drawn into the struggle between these two determined women, while continuing his search for the Deer God who may heal his wound and lift the curse.

Unlike earlier films of Miyazaki's, *MONONOKE* is not directed towards children. And it is not a musical, as is much U.S. animated product, although there are songs on the soundtrack. The film offers a complex, adult narrative that eludes a conventional, heart-warming resolution. Its characters are richly conceived and developed, and there is no standardized villain to conquer. This story could take place only in Japan—it is intensely Japanese in all its details, giving the film a meticulous, colorful specificity—but its themes are timeless and universal. Miyazaki's animators, led by Masashi Ando, Kitari Kosaka and Yoshifumi Kondo, have translated his vision of forest, water, iron-



Women who run with wolves: the title character of Hayao Miyazaki's *PRINCESS MONONOKE* is a human step-daughter to the great forest wolf Moro.

works, gods and monsters into exquisite visuals that can be appreciated best in a theater.

Aware of what was at stake with the theatrical release of what many consider the crowning achievement of Miyazaki's career, Disney subsidiary Miramax hired author Neil Gaiman (*SANDMAN*) to write the English dialogue. Like Miyazaki, Gaiman has consistently drawn from mythology, folklore, literature and history in his own work, and his characters also live in worlds where the everyday and the fantastic—and nature and industry—intersect.

Gaiman, who has enjoyed viewing anime but admits he is no expert on the subject, knew nothing about Miramax's plans for *PRINCESS MONONOKE* until he received a call from company president Harvey Weinstein, who asked if he would be interested in writing the dubbing script for the film. Gaiman's name had been suggested by Quentin Tarantino, whose mother was a fan of Gaiman's. Gaiman wasn't particularly interested at first, until

he viewed the film at a private screening while on a trip to Los Angeles. "The art work is stunning," he enthused. "You can lose yourself in it. It is genuinely mythic, and the whole plot is completely and magnificently not Western. It's not Disney. There's something [different] about this little 14-year-old girl, San, sucking the bullet out of an injured wolf, blood all over her face—or just that first moment, when the demon comes out of the forest."

Although many anime fans feel *PRINCESS MONONOKE* should have been subtitled in order to keep the original Japanese dialogue intact, Gaiman acknowledges that English dialogue is necessary to draw in the widest possible audience, since most people avoid subtitled films. "I would hope that people would simply go and see it. It's wonderful," he said. "Miramax wants this to reach the widest possible audience and so does Studio Ghibli—and I think it deserves to. I'm genuinely fascinated to see how it's going to work." □



# STAR WARS

## THE PHANTOM MENACE

**George Lucas returns to the director's chair for Episode 1.**

*By Lawrence French*

Although principal photography on Episode One of the STAR WARS saga wrapped in September, 1997, rumors recently surfaced that much of the footage may have to be re-shot. According to a report from the Tribune Media Syndicate, Lucasfilm insiders are claiming that, because the cost-conscious Lucas insisted on looking at all his dailies on video monitors, rather than on 35mm film stock, he failed to realize that much of the footage is out of focus. Since Lucas has been busy since last October putting together the rough cut, as well as supervising the elaborate special effects for the film, this rumor would seem to lack verisimilitude. It appears, rather, that re-shooting was always part of Lucas's master plan. Lucas apparently wanted to finish shooting in time to edit a rough cut, well in advance of the movie's opening date

(May 25th, 1999). This way, he could re-evaluate his progress, and easily re-work major portions of the film, as new story concepts and ideas presented themselves during the editing. Though this approach is certainly unorthodox, it is by no means unprecedented. Orson Welles often worked in exactly the same manner, which unfortunately, is why many of his films were never completed. Because he usually works with a small repertory of actors, Woody Allen has often had the luxury of reassembling his cast to reshoot sequences. Even self-styled Lucas-protege Rusty Lemorande (who co-produced Disney's 3-D short CAPTAIN EO with Lucas) attempted this sort of approach on a remake of JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH, which ended up going unreleased.

Unlike Welles and Allen, Lucas has the financial resources that allow him to keep many of his major sets standing idle for



The long-awaited prequel arrives later this year.

months at a time, until he decides if he wants to recall his actors for additional live-action filming. In effect, Lucas is allowing himself the chance to create an early version of his movie, to see what works and what doesn't, and then go back and re-do it to his ultimate satisfaction, without having to wait for 20 years, as he did with his STAR WARS Special Editions.

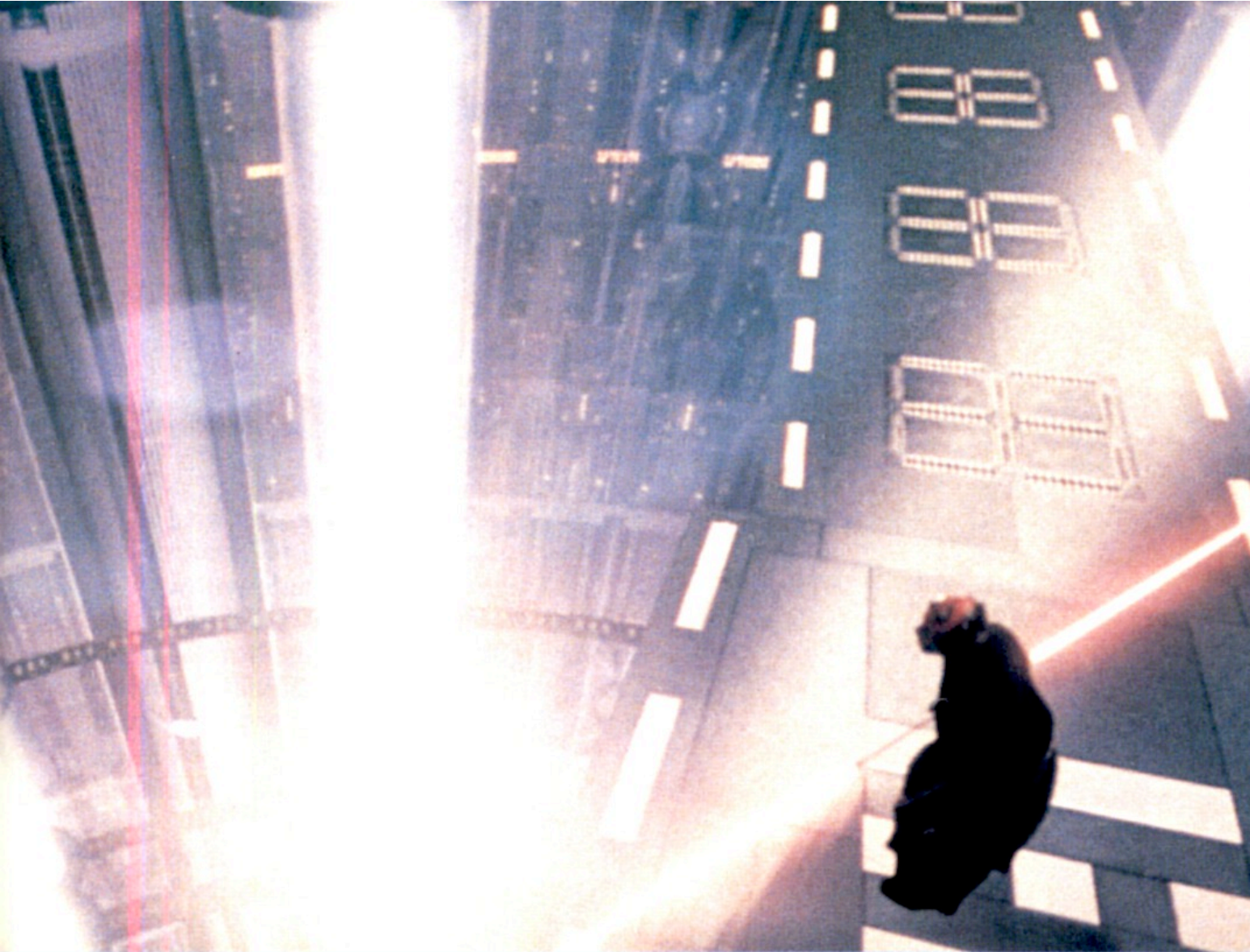
Because Lucasfilm is financing Episode One totally in-house, there has also been a decided attempt to control costs. Hoping to keep the budget at around \$110 million, Lucas decided to go with newer and younger talent behind the camera, rather than using the seasoned veterans of the earlier STAR WARS pictures. As Hitchcock did on PSYCHO, Lucas has assembled a lower paid TV crew who worked mostly on the lack-luster YOUNG INDIANA JONES CHRONICLES. They include producer Rick McCallum, production designer Gavin Bocquet, and cinematographer David Tattersall. Composer John Williams and visual effect supervisor Dennis Muren will be the only alumni returning from the first three STAR WARS films.

In another surprising twist, Lucasfilm's usual stranglehold on information seems to be loosening to a large degree: stills, concept drawings and plot points have already been confirmed by the normally reticent director. Prior to filming at the magnificent Royal Palace in Caserta, Italy (near Naples and Mt. Vesuvius), Lucas held a press conference and revealed some of the story of Episode One. "This film introduces R2-D2 and C-3P0 into the series," said Lucas. "You find out where they came from and how they got started. This is a film about

Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd) meets Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor), with Liam Neeson looking on.







“This film is about Anakin Skywalker, who becomes Darth Vader. It is only my fourth film as director, so I haven’t come that far yet.”

—Writer-director George Lucas—

Yoda will return as both an animatronic creation, played by Frank Oz, and as a CGI effect. Samuel L Jackson and Liam Neeson round out the cast, the latter as a Jedi Master, who brings the young Anakin to Obi-Wan for instruction in the way of the Force. In what might be an inspired bit of casting for the second or third episode, Christopher Lee could play a Grand Moff character, carrying out the evil designs of Senator Palpatine, just as Peter Cushing did so marvelously in STAR WARS. □

Familiar STAR WARS imagery abounds in the new film, as heroes played by Liam Neeson and Ewan McGregor face the evil Darth Maul across a cavernous corridor.

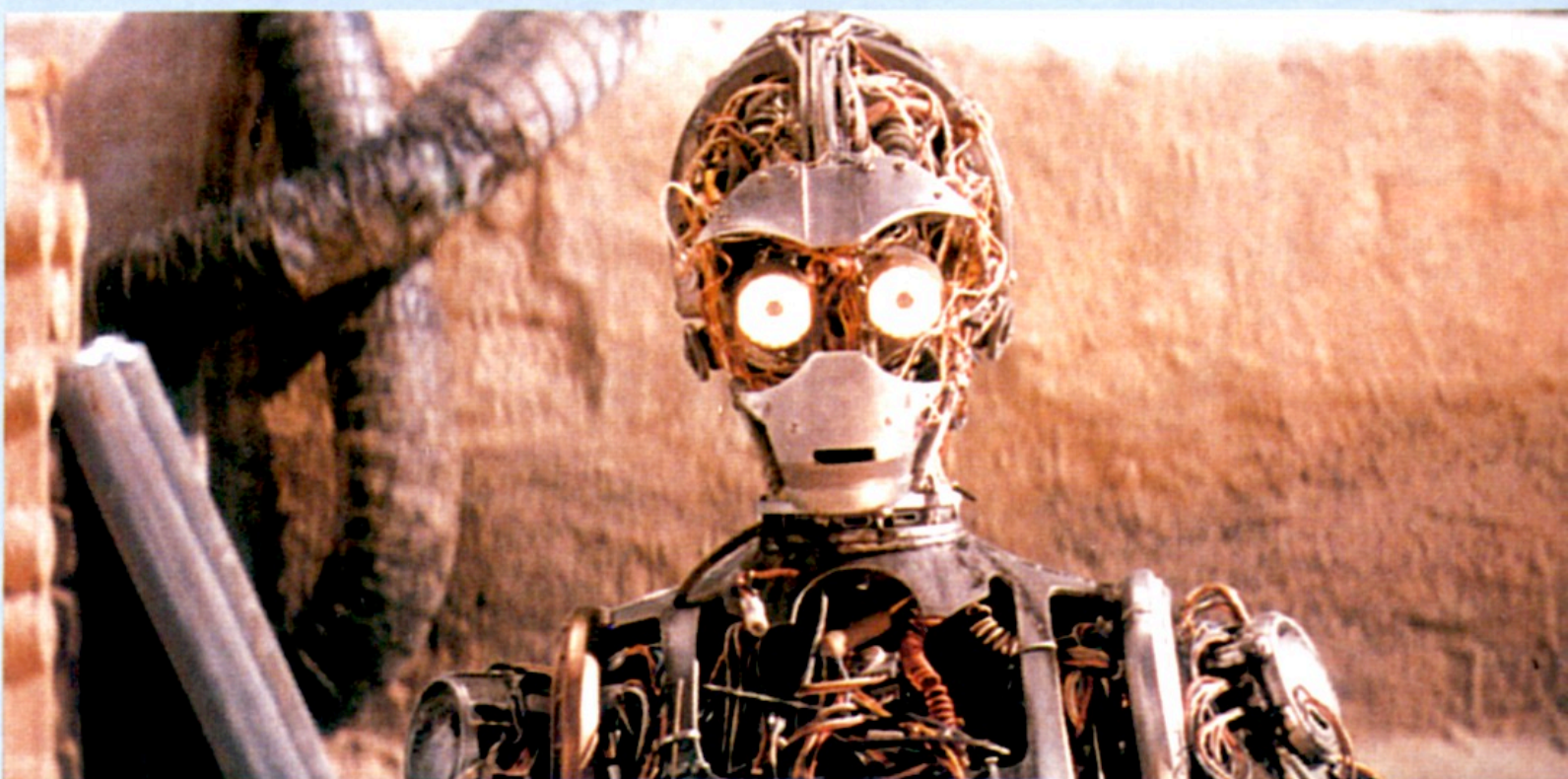
young Anakin Skywalker [Jake Lloyd]. He’s nine years old, and he is the character who eventually becomes Darth Vader, the father of Luke and Leia. This is only my fourth film as a director, so I’m a young director; I haven’t come that far yet. I feel fortunate to be living during this exciting period in filmmaking. It’s equivalent to the beginning of the cinema or the point when sound was first discovered, or color. Digital technology is a new color for an artist in the cinema to expand their imagination.”

The rather pretentious trailer (“Every legend has a beginning...”) has already generated strong interest, ever since its sneak preview in a Westwood, California, theatre showing THE SIEGE (audiences paid their eight bucks, sat through the trailer, and then walked out before the feature started). It has also provoked rhapsodic reactions from fans and critics citing it as proof that Lucas ascribes to the dictum “plot does matter”—a joke on the official STAR WARS website, posted as a response to last year’s ad campaign for GODZILLA.

With Anakin Skywalker learning to become a young Jedi, the main villain role will go to the ruthless Senator Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid), who eventually becomes the Galactic Emperor. Palpatine schemes to end the Republic from his home planet of Coruscant. Leading the opposition to Palpatine in the Senate, is Mon Mothma (Caroline Blakiston), who was first introduced in RETURN OF THE JEDI as the head of the Rebellion. Terence Stamp will play the Chancellor of the Senate; Ewan McGregor is the young Obi-Wan Kenobi; and Natalie Portman plays the royal Queen who eventually marries Anakin Skywalker in Episode Two.



Familiar faces pop up in the prequel. Above: a much younger Yoda than the one introduced in THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, looks a bit cross-eyed. Below: his face isn’t complete yet, but that’s clearly C-3PO.





## Science-fiction

By Chuck Wagner

The Unocal Building in downtown Los Angeles stares out vacantly over a bleak, urban neighborhood. Empty, but not abandoned, during the spring of 1998 the building saw signs of life in the lobby—and in lit windows on the 13th floor. For this is where Centropolis Streamline, a division of Centropolis Entertainment, filmed *THE 13TH FLOOR*, a science fiction movie to be released in March in the U. S. by TriStar Pictures.

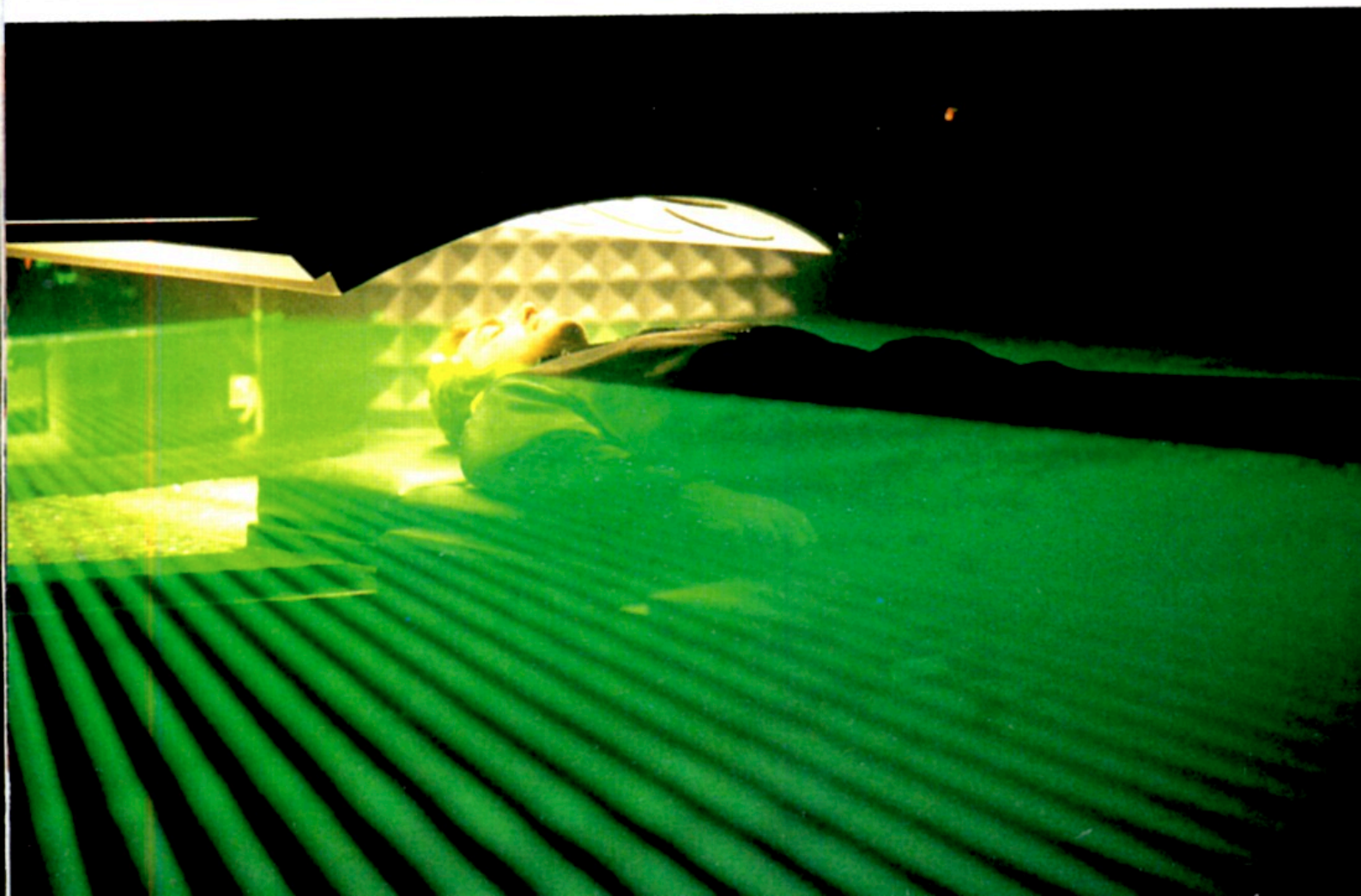
Originally a German TV series in the '70s, the film revolves around the mysterious death of business tycoon Hannon Fuller (Armin Mueller-Stahl). Soon, those investigating the death are sucked into a vortex of murder and deception as Fuller's death reveals a dangerous double-life that veers between two parallel worlds: one in the present, the other in a technologically-created 1937, complete with people who don't know they're in a parallel world and are apparently creations as well.

Directed by Josef Rusnak (who directed the second unit on *GODZILLA*), *THE 13TH FLOOR* is produced by Roland Emmerich, Ute Emmerich and Marco Weber. In addition to Mueller-Stahl, the approximately \$20 million production features Craig Bierko, Dennis Haysbert, Vincent D'Onofrio and Gretchen Mol.

"I was drawn to *THE 13TH FLOOR*," Weber explained, "because I'd seen the series on German TV in the '70s and was drawn to the story. Roland Emmerich apparently had, too!" Of his director he added: "I enjoy Josef Rusnak's use of angle in the camera work. He's visually very exciting."

Also visually exciting is Gretchen Mol (previously seen in *ROUNDERS*), who plays Jane Fuller. "I've come in to take over my dead father's company and shut the whole operation down," explained the actress. "My character's a mysterious woman. And, yeah—femme fatale. I guess that's the word. It's not my personality, but it's fun to play. I love all the old movies—Kim Novak, any woman who ever did an Alfred Hitchcock movie. Those are the kinds of things I've been looking at with regards to this role."

In *THE 13TH FLOOR*, the story takes place in two parallel worlds, beginning in the 1990s (left) and then moving to a virtual reality version of 1937.





# THE 13TH FLOOR

film noir suspended between past & present.

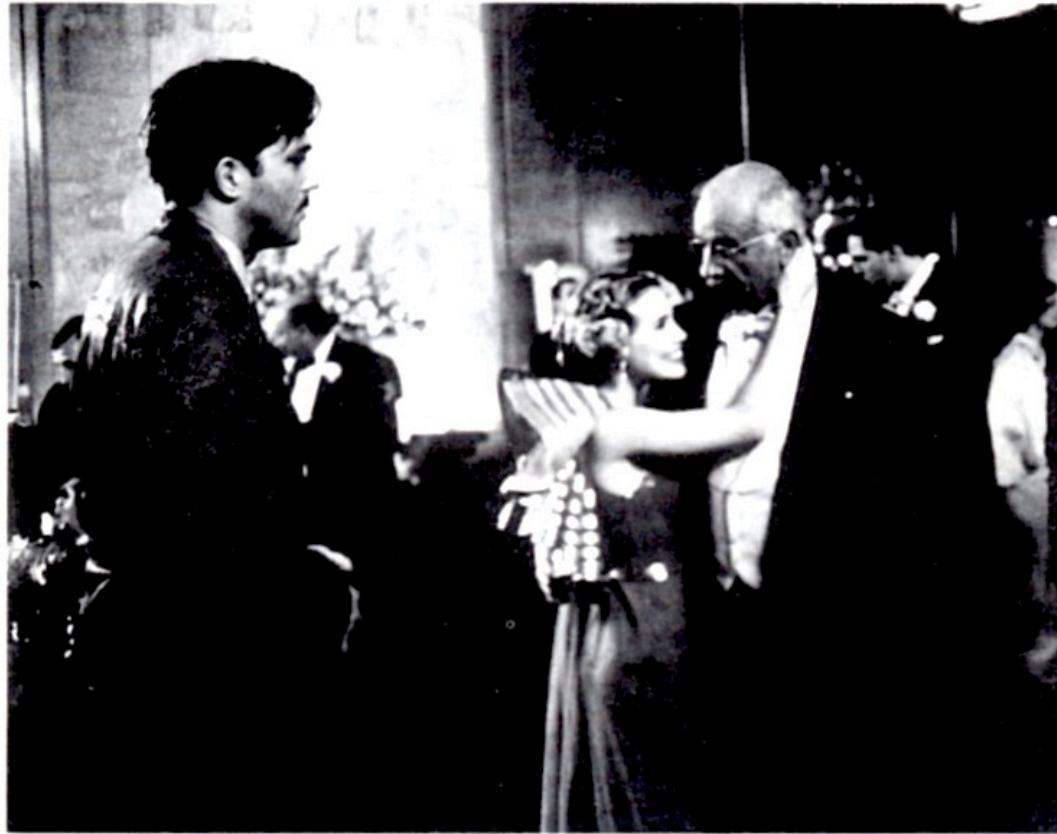
"The whole style of shooting really has that noir quality to it," Mol explained. "Everything is very stylized. The script is really clever. That's why I'm not saying too much about it, because that'll wreck it for everybody."

And noir means a fun challenge for the production designer, in this case Kirk Petrucelli. "This is a production designer's dream," Petrucelli said. "We had an opportunity to dive back into the recreation of the '30s in Los Angeles and deal with all the consequences of that, and also create a very modern look at what Los Angeles is. Two different worlds, and you have the romance and a mystery going through both times. It's phenomenal from my end."

So which was the most difficult, the '30s or the '90s? "The most challenging was actually the '90s. The '90s are so personal. We're all going through it right now. We all have a take on what it could be. What we did in the '30s is go with historical accuracy. We went back to make it a really lush world, something your grandparents would be very fond of. For the '90s we went very minimal. We eliminated everything. Very cold, very reflected. We used grid forms, linear forms, a lot of empty spaces. A lot of looking through layers upon layers upon layers, seeing you can never escape it. So it's actually a very minimalist, very forced interpretation of what the '90s is."

"You always have to know where you are in the story," Petrucelli continued. "We stayed away from ornate or baroque style. In the '30s we went with a very organic, very classical style. Earth tones and clutter and non-angles. In the '90s, Bauhaus is so strong of an art form itself that it became the basis of what the '90s is. There are no wires or ornate or chaotic things involved. It's very simple, very clean. That's how you come to a stylized realization of what the '90s are."

For Petrucelli, the story of the movie is, in production design terms, a peeling away of the layers of the '30s, where the mysteries lie, to reveal the truth beneath. For it is this construct of the '30s, as re-envisioned



In the parallel world of 1937, Douglas Hall (Craig Bierko, left) discovers his supposedly late employer, tycoon Hannon Fuller (Armin Mueller-Stahl, center).

by the Hannon Fuller character, that holds keys to the mystery in the story. Fuller's construct of 1937 is warm and inviting. We don't see the Depression or other period problems here. CG and miniature elements are used to create the open spaces and feel of old Los Angeles. Petrucelli studied old films, old newspapers, and old travel magazines to get the sense of that era. One shot even involved putting 300 costumed people, 45 vehicles (old buses, old trolleys with reinserted cables) on contemporary 4th and Main in Downtown Los Angeles. Success for Petrucelli is making the viewer feel like they're really in that period.

For the '90s, the emphasis was on finding barren spaces and making them uninviting, angular. "We basically found emptiness," Petrucelli explained, "and went another way. We put new floors in: if the space originally had a carpeted floor, we put in a hard floor to get reflections. A lot of glass, so you can see coordinating reflections. We lit with less directional light, back lighting a lot of things."

For Craig Bierko, 13TH FLOOR is his first starring role in a genre film. He plays Douglas Hall, friend and second-in-command to Hannon Fuller. It is he who gets pulled into a vortex of murder and deception as he tries to learn what happened.

"I haven't played a role like this before," Bierko said. "I'm trying to make the char-

acter as real as possible. I think it's interesting to watch somebody who can't handle a situation, rather than somebody who's always in control. It keeps you on the edge of your seat more. My character lives in something of an insular world. He spends a lot of his time on the 13th floor."

THE 13TH FLOOR provides Bierko's character with the chance to experience an artificially-constructed world of 1937, and encounter tension and romance in the form of a woman named Jane (played by Mol) who is the dead Hannon Fuller's daughter and heir. On meeting her, Bierko's character is haunted by the feeling he knows her from somewhere. "Once I unravel why I have that

feeling with her, I start getting closer to the answer of what actually happened," explained Bierko, who suggests that to really see the mysteries of the movie, you need to see it a second time. "When I read that in the script, I thought I'd never seen that in a story before. It reminded me of the first time I'd come across a great TWILIGHT ZONE episode, where you just didn't know how something was going to flip over at the end." □

Gretchen Mol (ROUNDERS) plays Hannon Fuller's daughter and heir, Jane, who holds the key to the mystery of the parallel world's existence.





# WING COMMANDER

**Hollywood takes another chance at turning a videogame into a hit film.**

*By Anthony  
P. Montesano*

Basing a film on a game has not yet proven to be one of Hollywood's strong suits. The ill-fated *CLUE*, based on the popular mystery board game, failed to draw huge audiences with its gimmick of different endings in different theaters. The Roland Joffe-produced *SUPER MARIO BROS.*, directed by Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel (of *MAX HEADROOM* fame) and starring Bob Hoskins, was nothing more than a blip in theaters. While *MORTAL KOMBAT* made some initial noise, the marketing juggernaut planned behind the launch of that game-to-film effort never took off in earnest. Even the video arcade sensation *Pac-Man* proved to be a weak entry in the Saturday morning cartoon race of the 1980s.

Still, 20th Century Fox is hedging its bets with yet another game-to-film adaptation. *WING COMMANDER*—which is scheduled to hit theaters in the anticipatory months before Fox unleashes its new *STAR WARS* movie—has a twist: it is the first such adaptation in film history to be directed by the creator of the game upon which it is based. Beyond that, *WING COMMANDER*, the game, was conceived as a film when it was first invented by wunderkind Chris Roberts in 1990, and the migration path the game has taken since advanced the



Videogame creator Chris Roberts (center) directs the \$25-million film adaptation of his mega-successful computer game hit, *WING COMMANDER*.

popular series further and further in that direction. *WING COMMANDER III* was the first truly interactive game with full motion video and real live movie stars (Mark Hamill, Malcolm McDowell, John Rhys-Davies). *WING COMMANDER IV* was the first to incorporate 35mm film. It only seemed logical that this "game with a film mentality" would one day become a full fledged film itself. Since the launch of the first *Wing Commander* game, the series has produced four full sequels combining to generate in sales more than 5 million units worldwide.

"I agree that most games-to-movies have been spotty," said Roberts, who is making

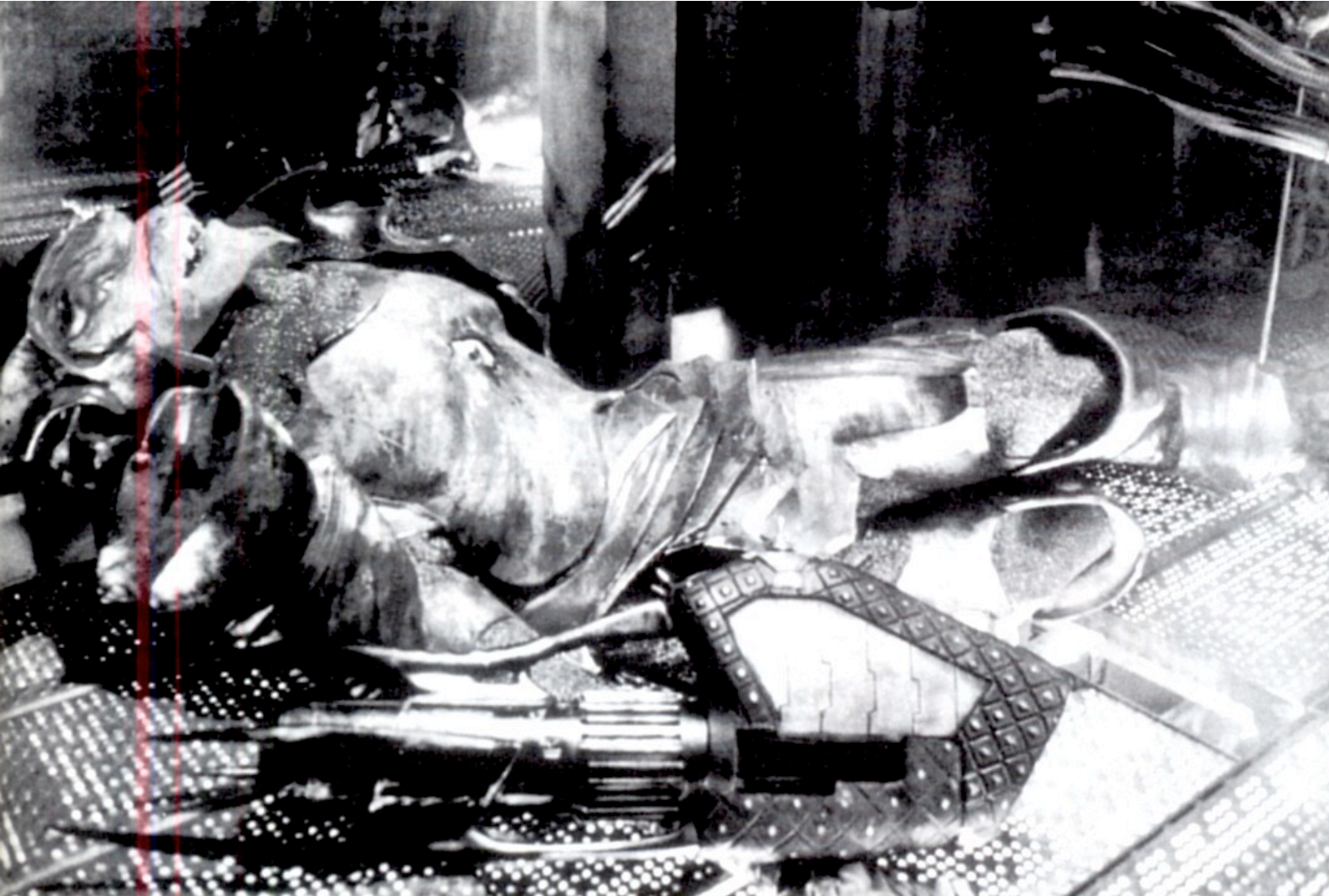
his feature film debut. "*MORTAL KOMBAT* is a bunch of characters kicking each other in the head. The bottom line is: you need a good story and compelling characters. Of course, I'm biased, but I believe *WING COMMANDER* has both. *WING COMMANDER* was inspired by movies in the first place. I tried to make the first game feel like a movie and moved toward more live action in III and IV. I was glad now that I directed the live-action scenes in the game. It was good training for me."

The film, which stars Freddie Prinze Jr. (*I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*), Matthew Lillard (*SCREAM*) and Saffron Burrows (*CIRCLE OF FRIENDS*) is a No Prison-

ers/Digital Anvil production in association with the Carousel Pictures Co. The producer on the film is Todd Myer who oversaw development of *THE MASK*, *TIMECOP*, and *BARB WIRE*. Fox agreed to distribute in the United States and English-speaking territories as part of a negative pick up deal. Digital Anvil was formed by Roberts as a film production-and-special effects company. (The bulk of the over 300 special effects shots in the film were created by Digital Anvil.)

The budget of the *WING COMMANDER* feature is a modest \$25 million. To stay on time and within costs Roberts had to be inventive during production, which took





In the WWII-type storyline, the forces of Wing Commander battle Kilrathi, the evil alien invader (above).

place on two sound stages in Luxembourg. "WING COMMANDER is a very contained movie," said Roberts. "All of the sets are the interior of space ships. I was going for a DAS BOOT in space kind of feel. I always envisioned WING COMMANDER as a World War II naval film set in a science fiction universe." Peter Lamont served as production designer. With four Oscar nominations under his belt, Lamont finally won the award last year for his work on TITANIC. Lamont has worked on a number of James Bond films including LICENSE TO KILL and GOLDENEYE. He also contributed to TRUE LIES and ALIENS.

Said Roberts, "Some shots in the film, stylistically, will look digital with a painterly feel to it. Every effects shot in the film was handled digitally. We built six full models of the Wing Commander ships as guides. Digital artists were then sent out to copy the look as the basis for the CGI effects."

Like the game which preceded it, WING COMMANDER follows the exploits of Christopher Blair (Prinze), a young pilot fresh from the academy but harboring a shady secret past. Carrying an encoded message about the dreaded Kilrathi invasion, Blair and his comrades Maniac (Lillard) and Deveraux (Burrows) join the Confederation forces as they mobilize to evade and repel the alien attack of the half man/half feline Kilrathi.

"We created a brand new story line for the film" said Roberts. "It's the story of the beginning of Wing Commander. Blair is 21 years old. But the spirit of the game is definitely in the movie. I've stuck very close to the Wing Commander universe. This is Blair's first mission, I sort of liken the opening of the film to the attack on Pearl Harbor."

Hamill, whose Luke Skywalker in STAR WARS can be seen as the spiritual inspira-

tion for Blair, was simply too old to reprise his role from the Wing Commander III game, which takes place later in Blair's career. While Malcolm McDowell was to be the only actor from the game to carry over to the feature film, an offer to star in the ill-fated remake of TV's FANTASY ISLAND lured him away. "ABC was offering him a lot of money for a 13-episode commitment," said Roberts. "I told Malcolm to go for it. Not to pass it up for a role that might have amounted to little more than a cameo in the film"

The impending release of STAR WARS could be felt during the making of WING COMMANDER. A 52-day shoot was followed by an intense six-month post-production schedule to create the over 300 CGI effects in the film. Originally to keep costs down, Roberts' own Texas-based company Digital Anvil was set to execute all of the

**“Most games-to-movies have been spotty. Bottom line: you need a good story and characters. I’m biased, but I believe our film has both.”**

—Director Chris Roberts—

effects for about half the price of a typical Hollywood effects house. However, with more and more pressure to complete the film in time for a pre-STAR WARS release, a percentage of the effects work needed to be farmed out to other houses around town including Digiscope, Pacific Title/Mirage and the Post Group.

"The six months we had to post the film should have been 10 to 12 months," commented Roberts. "Time is always an issue to refine the look of the film." Roberts further pointed out that the attention to detail required for the film is light years beyond the game. "We did miles more pre-production for this film than we did for any of the games, and it still wasn't enough," he admitted. "The real eye opener for me was the fact that due to time constraints and budget, we were not as able to be flexible when shooting the film as I had been when shooting the games. The games were more of a fluid process where we had the freedom to refine a shot two or three times. Because of our tight shoot, we ended up locked in the post to only using certain shots. But you want to give yourself some options when shooting. Excess material is good. Things will come out in the editing process that you didn't realize when shooting. Next time I will allow more options for myself." □

Freddie Prinze Jr. (I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER) stars as Christopher Blair, a fresh young pilot in the Luke Skywalker mold, along with SCREAM's Matthew Lillard as Blair's comrade, Maniac.





# CARRIE II

## Carrie is dead, but United Artists hopes the franchise will live on for a new generation.

By William  
Wilson Goodson, Jr.

Nearly everyone in the film industry talks about directing. Katt Shea actually did something about it—writing and directing a handful of profitable low-budget films, beginning with an apprenticeship with Roger Corman. Her newest project is *CARRIE II*, which she dropped into at the last minute, after the original director left the project. “Everything happened for me so fast—I think it was a Saturday when I found out I was making the film Monday,” she recalled. “I was really worried when I started because *CARRIE* is such a classic movie, and I didn’t know how I would ever live up to it. But with the cast and the way we are shooting it and the DP I have and the cameraman, I think it’s going to stand as a classic in its own way.”

*CARRIE II* is the first film Ms. Katt has directed but not written; the script was by Rafael Moreu (*HACKERS*). “When I am writing it, I know it [the script] inside out,” she said. “In this case, I don’t, and I have to keep referring back to the script, but other than that it’s not that much different.”

As she sees it, the appeal of the story is that “Carrie is this vulnerable little person who is treated very cruelly by others, and she gets back at them. I think everybody can identify with that. I know I can. I can so easily identify with being, you know, the outcast kid, the one used as a scapegoat, and you know that’s always your dream to destroy everybody—get them all in one room and cause chaos and destruction.”

The scapegoat turning the tables this time out is played by Emily Bergl. *CARRIE II* is Bergl’s first film, though her character Rachel is a blood relation to the Carrie White of the Brian DePalma film, the characterization is significantly different. “Rachel is almost gothic—the way she dresses kind of distances her from the rest of the school,” explained Bergl. On one arm the character even sports a tattoo. “I think it shows she is a little bit on the tough side,” said Bergl. “I think a heart intertwined by thorns symbolizes that Rachel is actually very vulnerable on the inside but she has this tough interior shell that is hard to break through.”

Still, the character fits the mold of a vul-



Director Katt Shea, who initially found work in Hollywood playing bit parts, makes a Hitchcockian cameo as a deputy district attorney in *CARRIE II*, but she calls being in front of the camera “torture, just torture.”

nerable outcast. “She is definitely an outsider,” said Bergl. “She comes from a pretty rough family background; her mother is in a mental institution, so she really doesn’t have a mother figure. Unlike the original, the mother is a little bit better at having a loving relationship, but her terrible disease prevents her from giving Rachel the maternal care she needs. Rachel’s in a foster home where the parents have taken her on to augment their income, so that is not the most positive situation either. She’s forced to be independent. She doesn’t have a very good support system around her. She is not aware of [her] telekinesis—it only happens when she is emotional—because her mother is schizophrenic; she’s afraid she’s insane and that these things that she sees when she’s emotional are from her imagination.”

The character who becomes aware of Rachel’s power will be familiar to fans of the original. Amy Irving has reprised her role—as Sue Snell—in *CARRIE II*. Irving chronicles the two-decade development of her character: “We last saw Sue in the final scene of *CARRIE*, where she woke up from a terrible nightmare and was screaming in her mother’s arms. Since

that time, Sue has been institutionalized and is now, 20 years later, the guidance counselor at the newly rebuilt high school. She is someone who is highly traumatized by the experience of the night of the prom, somebody who has never been able to really continue her life. She has stayed in the 1970s: her home still has records, Grateful Dead posters and an homage to her late boyfriend, Tommy Ross. She copes but has no man in her life, never got married. She’s trying to take it one day at a time.”

Irving said that her approach to this performance was a bit different than usual. “First of all—since I had played her already—it wasn’t like I had to go back and figure out my past. My past was right there on the screen. It was my choice that Sue stayed in that time and could never move forward; it wasn’t written in the script that way. That was just a choice that gave me something to play with.”

She added, “I [do] a lot of investigation and uncovering of secrets. I’m the one who recognizes, in Rachel, that there is something strange going on. And that brings back all the haunted memories from the



**“I was really worried when I started, because CARRIE is a classic, and I didn’t know how to live up to it. But I think this one stands on its own.”**

**—Director Katt Shea—**

night of the prom....”

Everyone involved in the film avoided revealing much of the plot, but Bergl did admit that “it is a genuine love story. She had never fallen love before in her life, and she meets a football player [Jason London], and within this kind of harsh depressing high school they make a real connection with one another.”

The romantic plot, of course, gives way to the kind of horrific consequences that fans will expect from a horror film. “I don’t think I’m giving anything away by saying that I had to lie on the hood of a car with broken glass in about 90 degree weather with blood and latex on my face,” said Bergl. “I have to be in front of this snow dome that explodes, and I almost got hit by a car too, though that was actually my fault. It hit the back of my foot going about 30 miles an hour so I have had some stunt-like experiences.”

Having been through this kind of experience 20 years before, Irving added philosophically, “When you are doing a horror film, of course, there are the special effects. It’s not all about relating to other characters. You can stand around doing some very strange things all night, and start to wonder why you went to drama school.”

Although the revival of the CARRIE franchise was obviously inspired by the current crop of teen terror flicks, Bergl insists that the film will stand on its own. “This is different than all the horror films coming out. I think what’s prompted a lot of the horror movies that are going into production is the success of movies like SCREAM. What makes me so excited about this movie is I think it is a true horror flick. It is in earnest. I mean, I think the SCREAM movies were very witty in their parody of the horror genre, but this is an honest horror flick. Also, it’s really not a slasher film at all. Like the original, there is really no violence in the film until the last 20 minutes. I think it’s more of a psychological horror. It’s all about how the characters relate to each other, the building of suspense, you know something bad is going to happen to her at the end, but you don’t know how. And I think that is what fascinates me about the film and why I am so excited about it.” □



**Top: Emily Bergl plays goth-girl Rachel, the film’s new telekinetic outsider. Middle: Amy Irving reprises her role as Sue Snell. Below: all hell breaks out as Rachel unleashes her telekinetic fury against her enemies.**





# TALOS THE MUMMY

**A horrific homage to Hammer and Harryhausen.**

*By Alan Jones*

Director Russell Mulcahy filmed *TALOS THE MUMMY* in 37 days, on a tight \$10 million budget. The film stars Jason Scott Lee (*SOLDIER*), popular British TV actress Louise Lombard, Sean Pertwee (*SOLDIER*), Lysette Anthony (*DR. JEKYLL & MS. HYDE*), Michael Lerner (*GODZILLA*), Honor Blackman (*GOLDFINGER*), Shelley Duvall (*THE SHINING*), John Polito (*HIGHLANDER*) and veteran Hammer actor Christopher Lee.

Mulcahy spent most of the Fall of 1997 in the tiny European country of Luxembourg,

Director Russell Mulcahy (left) collaborated on the script for *TALOS* with John Esposito (right).



The head of Talos, the Mummy, courtesy of the makeup effects team at KNB-EFX Group.

making *TALOS*. He was inspired by his love of *THE MUMMY*, Hammer's 1959 classic. *TALOS* is Mulcahy's homage to the movie he credits with putting him on the road to a directing career that led from rock videos to *HIGHLANDER* and *THE SHADOW*. "Christopher Lee was my idol," said Mulcahy. "Hammer films had a huge impact on my youth in Australia. I can clearly recall saying to myself, 'This is what I want to do with my life,' as I stared in awe at *THE MUMMY* poster. The

beam of light through Lee's bandaged torso was the starting point for *TALOS*."

The film was devised by Mulcahy and his one-time rock video collaborator Keith Williams as therapy to get over a skiing accident suffered by the director during Christmas, 1995. Williams recalled, "Knowing Russell's love for the Hammer movie, I thought it would be a great idea to come up with our own reinvented Mummy concept to fill the hours while his broken leg mended." Williams had his own agenda for redefining the Mummy myth—one primarily dating back to the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in Luxor, Egypt, by Howard Carter in 1922. Though "fond of the Boris Karloff Universal original," Williams thought it was time to reinvent the clichés.

*TALOS THE MUMMY* begins with the discovery of the tomb of an evil Egyptian prince by famed archaeologist Sir Richard Turkel in the Valley of the Kings in 1948.



Mulcahy's concept for the mummy was to make the bandages into the monster, capable of assuming many forms. However, it was necessary to include the humanoid form of the familiar striding juggernaut in order not to disappoint audience expectations.





**“Russell’s concentrated on the visual side, and I like that. His sense of movement and his feel for the horror genre are what’s important here.”**

—Star Jason Scott Lee—

But the mysterious death of everyone in the expedition begins rumors of an ancient curse befalling anyone who further desecrates the hallowed ground of the once powerful necromancer. Fifty years later, Turkel’s daughter Samantha leads a new expedition, using modern technology to discover the secrets of Talos. This unleashes Talos’ life-force, and he looks for the reincarnation of his Princess Nefriama. The search impacts Samantha’s life and the lives of those involved in continuing her father’s work; Talos’ spirit roams the London streets, reclaiming body parts for his rebirth at a pivotal astrological juncture.

Unfortunately, the treatment Mulcahy and Williams crafted was rejected by everyone they submitted it to. But refusing to give up on their brainchild, Mulcahy successfully pitched it to Daniel Sladek and Silvio Muraglia, the producers of *SILENT TRIGGER*, the Dolph Lundgren action mystery he had just completed making in Montreal for their Cine Grande Entertainment company. Sladek recalled, “We were in post-production on *SILENT TRIGGER* when Russell hobbled into our hotel lobby on crutches at four in the morning saying he wanted me to read something he hoped I’d find interesting. I have a great deal of respect for Russell, so I read the treatment and thought it was such a simple, yet effective, idea—Mummy wrappings taking over and going on a killing spree. No matter what else was in there, I felt the initial concept was brilliant and my partner, Silvio, thought the same.” However, because Sladek didn’t know anything about the business of horror, he asked Howard Berger, an old school friend, for advice. Berger certainly would know. He was the Bof the KNB Effects Group, the outfit responsible for the special effects in *X FILES: THE MOVIE* and *SCREAM*. “I thought the treatment was pretty bold,” said Berger. “But there was a lot of stuff that hadn’t been worked out properly. There wasn’t a main lead for the audience to focus on; there wasn’t really a



L to r: Shelley Duval, Jason Scott Lee, and Michael Lerner star in *TALOS THE MUMMY*.

proper monster, or indeed a final Mummy which I felt was important. I thought *TALOS* would be perfect for our company to be involved in on the effects side allowing for some major rethinking of the basic story line. So I suggested they hire a friend of mine, John Esposito, to write a screenplay.”

“My main contribution to *TALOS THE MUMMY* was the addition of Riley, the American Interpol detective called in to investigate the grizzly murders in London,” said Esposito (*GRAVEYARD SHIFT*). “Someone had to question the fantasy, and making him a lead character was the perfect way of doing that.”

Like many of the cast and crew involved in the film, Jason Scott Lee dropped his usual fee to star as Riley because he had faith in the project and in Mulcahy whom he had previously worked with on *THE HUNGER* television series. Scott Lee said, “He’s one of the few stand-up guys I’ve worked with. He’s there for you even if he doesn’t have the answers. He’s concentrated on the visual side of *TALOS*, and I like that as I’m not the sort of actor who likes being pushed into a performance. If I’m tweaked into a scene and given a free range, I prefer it. As long as you can trust the director to make you look good, that’s the best way for me to work. Russell’s sense of movement, his actor orchestration, and his feel for the horror genre is what’s important here.”

Brit TV actress Louise Lombard plays a rather glamorous member of the archeological expedition.



*TALOS THE MUMMY* is the first movie to be made under Mulcahy’s own company banner, Seventh Voyage, named after the Ray Harryhausen stop-motion animation classic *THE SEVENTH VOYAGE OF SINBAD*. Mulcahy remarked, “I plan to make numerous genre items using that brand label. I have a terrifying script titled *THE WATCHER* which I’m putting in production soon.” □





## Star Keanu

**W**hat is THE MATRIX?" asks the teaser campaign for Warner Brothers' new film, THE MATRIX. What if the world you think of as "reality" was actually being fed into your brain by a master computer? What if your mastery of cyberspace allowed you to achieve feats beyond the scope of mere mortals? What if you were called upon to recognize the truth and wake a sleeping populace?

In June of 1998, *Cinefantastique* was invited to Sydney, Australia, to find out the answers to these and other questions posed by the Wachowski Brothers' challenging science fiction thriller, THE MATRIX, starring Keanu Reeves (THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE), Laurence Fishburne (EVENT HORIZON), and Carrie-Ann Moss. Written and directed by Larry and Andy Wachowski and produced by action specialist Joel Silver, THE MATRIX is the sophisticated sophomore effort from the Wachowski brothers, screenwriters who turned filmmakers after writing ASSASSINS. They sold the script for THE MATRIX to Joel Silver before making their first film, BOUND, a genuinely tense and erotic thriller that promised a bright future for the filmmakers, the most stylish sibling team since the Coen brothers. Seeing BOUND convinced both Silver and Warner Bros. that the best people to direct THE MATRIX would be Larry and Andy Wachowski themselves.

THE MATRIX tells the story of Neo (Reeves), a computer hacker in the 22nd century who knows more about living inside a computer than outside one. He receives a wake-up call that the Matrix has him and so discovers

Neo (Keanu Reeves, right) confers with Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburne, left), who informs him that his entire life, everything he thinks of as reality, is actually an artificial construct maintained by machines enslaving humanity.



# MATRIX

Reeves battles the evils of cyberspace slavery.

BY DENNIS FISCHER



One of Morpheus' allies (Carrie-Ann Moss) offs one of the Agents who try to keep Neo (Reeves) from learning the truth.

that reality is not as he imagined it. He joins a band of freedom fighters headed by Morpheus (Fishburne) in their struggle against the evil computers that control the environmentally ravaged Earth. The machines keep the populace passive by plugging them into The Matrix, a virtual reality universe that resembles the late 20th Century.

Inspired by the high voltage excitement of Hong Kong action films, the Wachowskis decided to create a science fiction action thriller that would utilize the incredible fighting styles of top flight kung fu films to take most Western audiences to a new level of excitement.

"These guys [the Wachowskis] are very heavily into the Hong Kong kung fu fighting

to the extent of insisting [on] having [Hong Kong fight choreographer and director] Wo Ping and his team of Hong Kong wire guys to help them and train all the actors and execute all the wire work," explained producer Andrew Mason. Dedicated to getting the same energy that's in those Hong Kong films, the Wachowski brothers put their lead actors through a rigorous three-month-long training program simply to prepare them for filming (enough time for each of them to have completed an additional film). Additionally, the story is genuine science fiction which calls into question how reality can be manipulated and taps into modern-day paranoia.

Producer Barrie Osborne,

whose experience ranges from Francis Coppola's APOCALYPSE NOW to John Woo's FACE/OFF, became involved in THE MATRIX in July of 1997 while he was finishing up FACE/OFF at Paramount. "I got a call from Bill Jacobs at Warners to meet with Larry and Andy [Wachowski]," Osborne recalled. "I had a great meeting and liked the script. I thought it was a pretty cool picture and got involved mainly because they had been trying to get it up for quite a while, and it had been through quite a few different gyrations.

"At one time it was going to be made in Chicago, another time Chicago and L.A. They went through a higher budget version and lower budget ver-

sion and decided to make it in Australia, where I'd been before on RAPA NUI, which had been made on Easter Island with an Australian crew."

Osborne liked BOUND, and knew the Wachowskis could realize the potential in their script. Said Osborne, "What I like about the story is that you, the audience, discover with your lead character Keanu that the world you know—or thought you knew—isn't quite what it seems to be. Then you realize that you're living in a virtual world, and the world is really not what it seems to be. I like what I consider to be one of the main themes of the film: that you can accomplish what you want if you put your will to it. The technique of revealing with the main character the story and the reality is very clever and very well executed by Larry and Andy. They do that through the use of Hong Kong stunts which is a forced reality—stylized action. They were very clever to employ those guys. In fact, one of the very first things Larry said to me was that he really liked FISTS OF LEGEND and that's the guy who we'd really like to be our fight choreographer. I've worked in Hong Kong, so I found Wo Ping through my sources. Through Shaw Brothers and a number of others, we eventually tracked him down.

"The energy in the film also attracted me to it," Osborne added. "The way they use mirrors and reflections, so at times you know you're only dealing with a reflection of reality, is very clever.

Despite having worked with John Woo, Osborne credits Larry and Andy with doing all the research on Hong Kong cinema to find the right people for the



film. Wo Ping was once Jackie Chan's producer, and his curriculum vitae includes some of Hong Kong's most exciting action films.

**T**he Wachowskis' first film *BOUND* is a small piece with few settings or characters. By contrast, *THE MATRIX* is a far more elaborate production. The project was originally planned to be shot in Chicago, but that was deemed to expensive, and other localities were investigated. Explained Australian producer Mason, "Because we'd had a number of friends and contacts in common, someone called me and said, 'Why don't you come and talk to these guys about whether what they're after could be done in Australia. As it turns out it could."

"They came out and had a look," he continued. "These guys are not mainstream Hollywood filmmakers. They had in many ways no preconceptions about what they needed to make a movie, so they didn't come into Australia saying, 'Oh, to make a movie here we're going to need all these things.' They didn't look to duplicate shooting a film on a lot in L.A. They looked at what's here and at what they needed to make their film. This works terrifically. Plus it wasn't such a hard thing to convince everybody in the end because there's an obvious economic advantage to shooting here, but there's also evidence that there were the people around to do it, because over the past few years there's been an increasing number of films being shot here—from *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU*, to *BABE*, *BABE: PIG IN THE CITY*, and *DARK CITY*. *DARK CITY* especially involved lots and lots of set building, lots and lots of physical effects, and lots and lots of digital effects." Mason also feels that one of the advantages to an Aussie shoot is that most of the people working in Australia are really excited to be working on a big action film. For them, it isn't just another show like dozens of others that they have done, so he describes the level of enthusiasm as being "really terrific."

## HONG KONG-STYLE ACTION

**"Hong Kong stunts are a forced reality—stylized action," said Osborne of the directors' wish to hire Wo Ping. "They said that's the guy we'd like to be our fight choreographer."**



Australian actor Hugo Weaving and Laurence Fishburne enact one of the film's martial arts battles, inspired by Hong Kong films like *FISTS OF LEGEND*.

It was decided to film at Rupert Murdoch's Fox Studios in Sydney, rather than in Queensland, where Warners already has an active studio site, because the Warners facilities were not quite big enough to encompass the scope of the production. In addition, Fox had added some additional sound stages and indicated that they'd have their entire complex online in time for the filmmakers to do the really huge sets that simply wouldn't fit in Queensland.

"It was pretty obvious that this was the scale we were going to end up with," Mason observed. "Rupert Murdoch wanted to establish a production base in Sydney," he added, regarding the complex which was built on the site of an old exhibition area held by the Royal Agricultural Society and the state government. "People later complained that Murdoch got the better end of the deal, but I couldn't see why that was surprising. If you place a regular public servant and Rupert Murdoch in a room, who do you

think is going to get the better end of the deal?"

Murdoch's studio worries some Australians, including actor Hugo Weaving, who worked on the production. "I'm sort of wary about Fox Studios, and I'm still not sure about them," he said. "It opens up a lot of work for crews and for actors in usually supportive and minor roles, but my worry about it is that it swamps a culture. That's a major worry.

"You get a large American picture coming over here because a small Australian film would find it hard to pay the rent here. You get large budget films coming from the States, and they're American films, not Australian. They use Australian crews. The facilities are there, but whether or not that will stimulate anything other than an infrastructure, whether that will stimulate a culture, I don't know. Whether that will allow us to make bigger Australian films, I don't know. I have my worries."

While the Wachowskis' original setting was to be Chicago,

the brothers decided to modify the setting into a non-descript American city. Mason noted that this made it easier for Sydney to fill that kind of role because Sydney is Australia's densest, most modern city with many high rise buildings that would not be out of place in any major American metropolitan area. Naturally, such distinctive Sydney landmarks as the Harbor Bridge and the Sydney Opera House would not be featured in the film.

Additionally, Sydney offered plenty of resources to choose from in areas such as production design and costume design. Like most directors, the Wachowskis prefer working with a core group of people as they had on *BOUND*. They brought in Bill Pope as the director of photography and Zach Stiensberg as their editor. "Apart from that, they were very open to everyone else," said Mason. "It was pretty easy to show that the guys from the local effects companies have the same tools, and the same expertise, as everyone else and should be able to perform a vast quantity of the digital effects required."

American producer Osborne also weighed the pros and cons of Australian production. "There's benefits and there's problems," he noted. "The benefits are that right now the dollar is great. There are really accomplished technicians here, so you don't have to import people, which is great. The set construction costs are quite a bit cheaper than they are in America. If you look at our sets you'll see some pretty massive structures that were made for a fraction of the cost as in the U.S. That's the big advantage, really."

*THE MATRIX* was partially filmed on actual locations in Sydney with the rest shot on various sound stages in and out of Murdoch's Fox Studios. Despite the cost-cutting in set construction, Osborne does note that there are some disadvantages as well: "Disadvantages are that equipment seems to be more expensive here because there isn't such a big supply, and there's less competition so it gets more expensive to get equipment. I think this is some-



# MATRIX

## LAWRENCE FISHBURNE

*The acclaimed actor on playing Morpheus.*

*By Dennis Fischer*

*"We know that you have been contacted by a certain individual. A man who calls himself Morpheus. Whatever you think you know about this man is irrelevant to the fact that he is wanted for acts of terrorism in more countries than any other man in the world. He is considered by many to be the most dangerous man alive"*

—Agent Smith

Acclaimed actor Lawrence Fishburne (OTHELLO), exuding a quiet, commanding demeanor, took a break from filming in Sydney, Australia, to discuss MATRIX. "It is my good fortune to be playing Morpheus in this film," he said. "Where do I begin? Morpheus is someone you could describe as...the obvious word would be teacher, mentor—a not so obvious one would be religious fanatic," he laughed, "Morpheus is a seeker, who is looking for the One, as he is referred to in the script, the Keanu Reeves' character Neo. Morpheus has been on this mission to find the One for more than ten years, all his life, really. He's had several experiences where he thought he'd found this person, and he's been wrong several times, so there is always a bit of uncertainty when he chooses someone new."

What drew Fishburne to the film was its premise: "The idea that human beings can be used as batteries for a world that's dominated by computers or machines, if you will, and the idea that they can give us a false sense of reality—I thought that was really very, very frightening," he said.

Morpheus and his freedom fighters spend most of their time in the real world on a hovercraft called the Nebuchadnezzar, named for the insane king of Babylon who destroyed the temple at Jerusalem and brought the Jews into captivity. The name suggests the humiliation that comes to the mighty when they overreach themselves in

their wickedness.

"They use a method I guess you can only liken to computer hacking," said Fishburne, "so they can hack into the Matrix and pick up on different people's vital signs, their brain wave patterns. They do that illegally; it's all illegal business. If they get caught inside the Matrix or if they are detected inside the Matrix, the powers that be, the computers or machines that run the world, dispatch these sentient programs which are called agents. They are essentially virus killers. It's kind of a computer-hacking style picture, seeking out the One."

Neo's mentor Morpheus is ironically named. In mythology, Morpheus is lord of sleep, but the first thing this Morpheus does is wake the hero up to true reality. "[Morpheus] has to pull [Neo] out of contact,



Lawrence Fishburne plays Morpheus, the seeker who hopes to find "the One"—i.e., the person with the power to overthrow the artificial reality.

said Fishburne. "Once that's done, he's got to convince him that he's the One. He's got to get him to see that, so we bring him into the real world and download all this combat training into him. Then we sort of expose him to a simulated world, which is a construct, where we train him how to move in and out of the Matrix without being detected, and let him know what the dangers are, then know what the rules are, and let him know that some of the rules can be broken. Your basic survival skills, I guess, is what we teach him."

Fishburne was enthusiastic about working with the Wachowski brothers. "Larry and Andy are brilliant writers," he said, "and they are quite visionary as directors in terms of the film that they are making. The reason I was really excited about this movie is that they explained to me that they were attempting to make a film that you can compare to Japanese animation films like AKIRA and GHOST IN THE SHELL. Making a live-action film like that hasn't really been done. You don't see the kind of images in those two films I men-

tioned in live-action films. I thought that was really exciting and was really honored that they'd asked me to come join them. It's exciting to be part of something like that."

Japanese anime is not the only Asian influence on the Wachowskis' movie. Excited by the look of Hong Kong action films, the Wachowski brothers hired fight choreographer Yuen Wo Ping, Jackie Chan's mentor and director of the two popular DRUNKEN MASTER films. Wo Ping insisted that the lead actors be trained in movie kung fu and wirework for several months before filming would even begin.

Said Fishburne, "It's been great. It's been really for me probably the most beneficial thing I ever had to do just in terms of my physical health. Basically, in October [1997], we started with three hours of





Morpheus battles Agent Smith, a construct of the Matrix computer designed to police the virtual reality world.

kung-fu every day. We stretched for an hour and went through a series of kicking exercises. They put us through the paces of learning the actual choreography that we have to do in the film. That was about three hours every day, and of course, we all had personal trainers, so we broke with our personal trainers and did weight training, aerobic training, building strength and agility. And that was for about six months straight."

Regarding Wo Ping, Fishburne said, "I don't know that I had any preconceived notions of what he would be. I was really just kind of blown away by the films they had shown me that this man had choreographed or directed. I came prepared to do whatever he asked me to do."

The actors had to get used to Hong Kong style wirework as well. "The thing about the Hong Kong wire style, once we finished training and got to the place where we were actually doing this stuff, you can understand why you've been [training so hard]," said Fishburne, "because you have to be a lot stronger to deal with the one wire than you have to be to deal with two wires or four."

"It's the result of all the training that we've done. The choreography was worked out very early on in our training, so I would say two weeks into our training, they had pretty much mapped out the choreography for the major parts of the film. So we had the opportunity to do these fights over and over and over again. So that by the time they rolled cameras on us, it was really in the box. The only thing that was left to do was to act—to act the character, to act the scene."

In the film, Keanu Reeves adopts several Jet Lee style poses. As Fishburne recounted, "We had poses, and the pose is

one of the great selling points of all these kinds of movies. When you see a character go into a pose, it really tells you a lot about the personality, the fighting style, all that kind of stuff. I got my pose down. I have no idea how many styles [there are] specifically, but I do know that just working with Ping and his team, it's obvious to me that they have pulled from every kind of source that is available to them to come up with what is really going to be something that is exciting to watch. Also, whatever is going to be in keeping with whom the characters are."

Fishburne has watched more science fiction films than Hong Kong action films, with particular favorites being *BLADE RUNNER* and Luc Besson's *LA DERNIER COMBAT*, as well as the *STAR WARS* and *PLANET OF THE APES* films. "I didn't watch a whole lot of Hong Kong action films; I watched about two of them," he said. "This way, I couldn't get intimidated. If I had known what I was in for, I probably wouldn't have shown up. The fact is, I was ignorant, so I blissfully went to the warehouse of pain every day."

What Fishburne likes about science fiction is that "certainly there are visual opportunities, but more importantly it is the stories. The stories and the settings of the stories are somewhat fantastic and out of reach."

Regarding having two directors guiding the film, Fishburne commented, "It's been interesting. I was a bit concerned about it when we first started. They have a clear vision of what they want, and I have never experienced them being at odds with each other about it. I really like their vision as well. I think it's really exciting what they want to do. I think it's really neat they want me to be a part of this." □

## Directing **MATRIX**: The elusive Wachowski Brothers, Larry and Andy, go on the record to explain the genesis of the project.

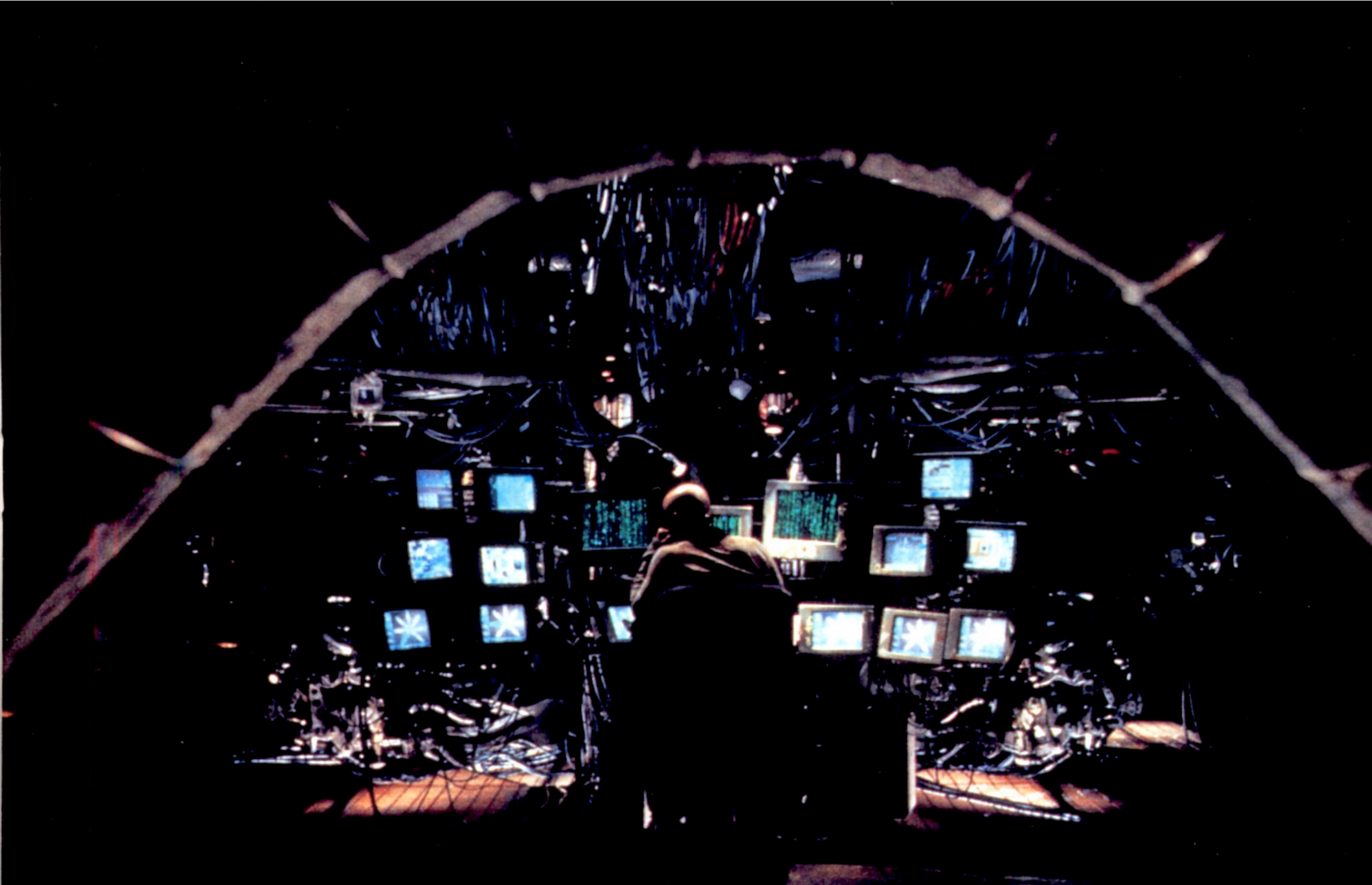
Dennis Fischer

The Wachowski brothers were too busy while filming *MATRIX* to talk with any journalists on set, and they seem very reticent to talk about themselves, revealing only that they have been working together for 30 years (i.e. how long they have been brothers), and that they have penned a screenplay for *PLASTIC MAN*, based on the cult comic book, for Amblin Entertainment. The only information they saw fit to reveal was in the form of a prepared statement, which read, "All of our stories tend to be set in an alternative world, even *BOUND* to a certain extent. We've always enjoyed fiction that relates to other dimensional realities, in particular science fiction writers such as J.G. Ballard. A few years ago, a friend of ours called to say that his publisher wanted an idea for a new comic book series and did we have anything? We said no, but after we'd hung up we came up with some crazy ideas and within a 48 hour-period we had a complete story that eventually became *THE MATRIX*."

"This was at a time when the whole cyber punk thing had just begun. We first thought that it wouldn't translate very well into a movie because in a visual sense cyber space is not particularly interesting. Our challenge then was to make it interesting. We began with the premise that every single thing we believe in today and every single physical item, is actually a total fabrication created by an electronic universe. Once you start dealing with an electronic reality you can really push the boundaries of what might be humanly possible. So if *THE MATRIX* characters can have instantaneous information downloaded into their heads they should, for example, be able to be as good as a kung fu master as Jackie Chan."

Of the directing duo, producer Osborne said, "These guys, as young as they are and as new as they are, simply have an incredible ability—a natural style that is unique to them." He added that *THE MATRIX* has "a lot of action that will bring in an audience," but ultimately he thinks the film is about self-reliance. "*MATRIX* was a challenging film to make," he said. "I really enjoyed working with Larry and Andy. They're really approachable and really nice guys. Their relationship with the cast is great. They inspire great loyalty. All through the movie we're forcing reality and saying to the viewers that this is real, but it's not that real." □





Morpheus in his lair keeps track of the virtual reality world while trying to alert humanity to the truth of their situation.

thing that needs to be absolutely addressed.

"I think a place like Fox Studios should have its own lights and its own tables and that sort of thing, instead of going out and renting it from individual vendors. It just gets too expensive. It's one thing to go out and get the gaffer and his truck to go out on location, but it's quite

another thing to go scramble around to try and get enough cables and enough generators to run all these sets. You need more competition. And I think it'd help if Fox had this stuff at the studio."

Regarding the Wachowskis themselves, Mason commented, "They're quite disciplined people. It's quite strange, actually,

when you see someone making an action film and not just shooting the hell out of it, because that's kind of what happens most of the time. If you do anything in an action film, you cover it with four cameras, and you hope to stick it together later. The Wachowskis very definitely have the whole film together in their heads and the whole process is just getting those that they've already seen in that sequence. On top of that they're seriously obsessed with all the positive aspects of having the actors do all the fighting. There are stunt doubles, but most of what happens is mainly Carrie-Anne [Moss] or Keanu or Lawrence [Fishburne] seriously wacking each other. I mean these people have trained for months and months and months to get this, and they can do these fights and they can really do this kung fu—all the jumping through walls and smacking into things.

"That's pretty impressive because when you can clearly see that these are actors and they're

truly doing it—it's a totally different style of shooting action than a normal American film, because a normal American film is covering up with cuts the fact that it's not the actor involved in the fight. It's the stunt double with the actor only there for the 'Ooof!' shot."

Mason proclaims himself a fan of science fiction. "I've watched every kind of science fiction film you can imagine," he said, "so *THE MATRIX* seemed like a good idea. It's intelligent science fiction; it happens that they mix it up with gut level fighting. But it still goes with a complicated and intelligent idea behind it. You can't have enough of that. The dumbing down of movies is really getting oppressive. The more smart science fiction that gets made, the better. All my memories of science fiction are those great sorts of stories that made you think. Stories like [Alfred Bester's] *The Demolished Man* made you start questioning your reality and addressed moral issues in a sort of oblique way." □

Despite the directors' use of Hong Kong style marital arts, *MATRIX* still has plenty of the gun play one expects from a film produced by Joel Silver.





# THE TOP 75 PEOPLE IN SCIENCE FICTION FANTASY AND HORROR FILMS

**Our sixth annual look at the genre's most important and influential players.**

It's time once again for our annual ranking of the Power Players of *cinefantastique*. Here, you will find out who had the biggest hits and sleeper successes last year, who turned a profit and who bombed out at the box office, who was reviled and who was revered, who suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous criticism and who earned critical kudos and Oscar respect—in short, who has earned the clout to get their work on the screen. We're not talking about hired hands who can get a job; we're talking about people who can generate their own projects with their own unique vision.

Since its debut five years ago, this feature has undergone several changes, moving away from a simple tally of who has their hands on the biggest purse strings to a more ephemeral (but hopefully more interesting) assessment



**#2:** As one-third of DreamWorks, Steven Spielberg continues to oversee numerous genre films, but as director he has moved away from fantasy.

of who has the interest and the talent to create great cinematic works of science-fiction, fantasy, and horror. This year, another obvious change has been made: expanding the ranking from 50 to 75. The reasons for this are twofold: (1) in the past, too many people who made a consistent contribution to the genre were being omitted simply because their successes were relatively modest; (2) several new names have jumped onto the list with blockbuster successes that cannot be ignored, while many of the old favorites have put together production slates and multi-pic deals that prove them to be still among the genre's Power Players. It says something good about the strength of science-fiction, fantasy and horror, that it is easy to find 75 people making important and entertaining contributions to the field. □



# 1 GEORGE LUCAS

(Last year's ranking: 3)

His record as an exec producer has been spotty (HOWARD THE DUCK, WILLOW), but his revised reissues of the STAR WARS trilogy revived interest in the blockbuster franchise. With his return to the director's chair for the STAR WARS prequel THE PHANTOM MENACE, Lucas is the man to beat in this year's sci-fi sweepstakes.



#6: James Cameron will reteam with Arnold Schwarzenegger (seen with Edward Furlong) for another TERMINATOR sequel.

# 2 STEVEN SPIELBERG

(Last year's ranking: 1)

As a director, Spielberg packs more clout in the high offices of Hollywood than Lucas, and he is (obviously) far more prolific. However, his recent interest in historical Oscar-bait movies has reduced his involvement in the genre to exec producer status on such films as DEEP IMPACT and SMALL SOLDIERS. Still, his studio, DreamWorks, is emerging as a major purveyor of big-budget genre films.



# 4 WALT DISNEY STUDIOS

(Last year: not ranked)

Okay, it's not a person but a corporate entity; nevertheless, this company deserves its slot because it continues to be the leader in the field of feature animation, despite worthy challengers like 20th Century Fox (ANASTASIA) and DreamWorks (ANTZ, PRINCE OF EGYPT). Given the number of people involved in the decision making process, it's a little hard to pinpoint individuals deserving credits for this, but perhaps the two men most responsible for Disney's continued ascendancy since the departure of Jeffrey Katzenberg are Peter Schneider and Thomas Schumacher, the president and vice-president, respectively, of the studio's feature animation division.



# 5 JEFFREY KATZENBERG

(Last year: not ranked)

Joining with Steven Spielberg and David Geffen to create DreamWorks, the former Disney topper has mounted Hollywood's most effective challenge to the Mouse House monopoly on animation, with two substantial hits (ANTZ and PRINCE OF EGYPT). Another animated epic, TUSKER, is on the way.



WILD WEST. Because of his success, he gets his share of big-budget directing gigs, which he can then tailor as he sees fit, but his one attempt to develop a project of his own, ABC-TV's revamped FANTASY ISLAND, was a ratings flop.

# 3 JERRY BRUCKHEIMER

(Last year: not ranked)

His specialty is high-powered action blockbusters, but last year this mega-successful producer more or less took over Gale Ann Hurd's ARMAGEDDON and applied his formula to turn the film into the biggest box office hit of the year (over \$200-million), easily eclipsing the year's expected winner GODZILLA. He followed that up with ENEMY OF THE STATE, a borderland genre effort that made another \$100-million.



# 6 JAMES CAMERON

(Last year: 4)

One of the four most powerful directors in Hollywood (along with Spielberg, Lucas, and Stanley Kubrick), Cameron slips a couple of notches because he has been away from the genre for several years, and his involvement with the oft discussed PLANET OF THE APES remake has been terminated. However, he has announced that he will write, produce, and possibly direct a third TERMINATOR. And supposedly his proposed SPIDERMAN is slowly disentangling itself from the legal web that's held it up for the last few years.



# 8 ROBERT ZEMECKIS

(Last year: 7)

He hasn't directed a film since CONTACT went blockbuster two years ago, but Zemeckis and producer Joel Silver recently announced the formation of Dark Castle, a company designed to produce low- to medium-budget horror films—an idea they previously tried under the umbrella of the TALES FROM THE CRYPT franchise. Their first effort: a remake of HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL.



#8: Having directed Jodie Foster in CONTACT, Robert Zemeckis next teams with Joel Silver to produce a series of low-budget horror films.



# 7 BARRY SONNENFELD

(Last year: 5)

The hit-happy director (MEN IN BLACK, THE ADDAMS FAMILY) brings another classic TV show to the big-screen: WILD,



#7: Barry Sonnenfeld (directing Tommy Lee Jones in MEN IN BLACK) returns with WILD, WILD WEST.





#5

# JEFFREY KATZENBERG

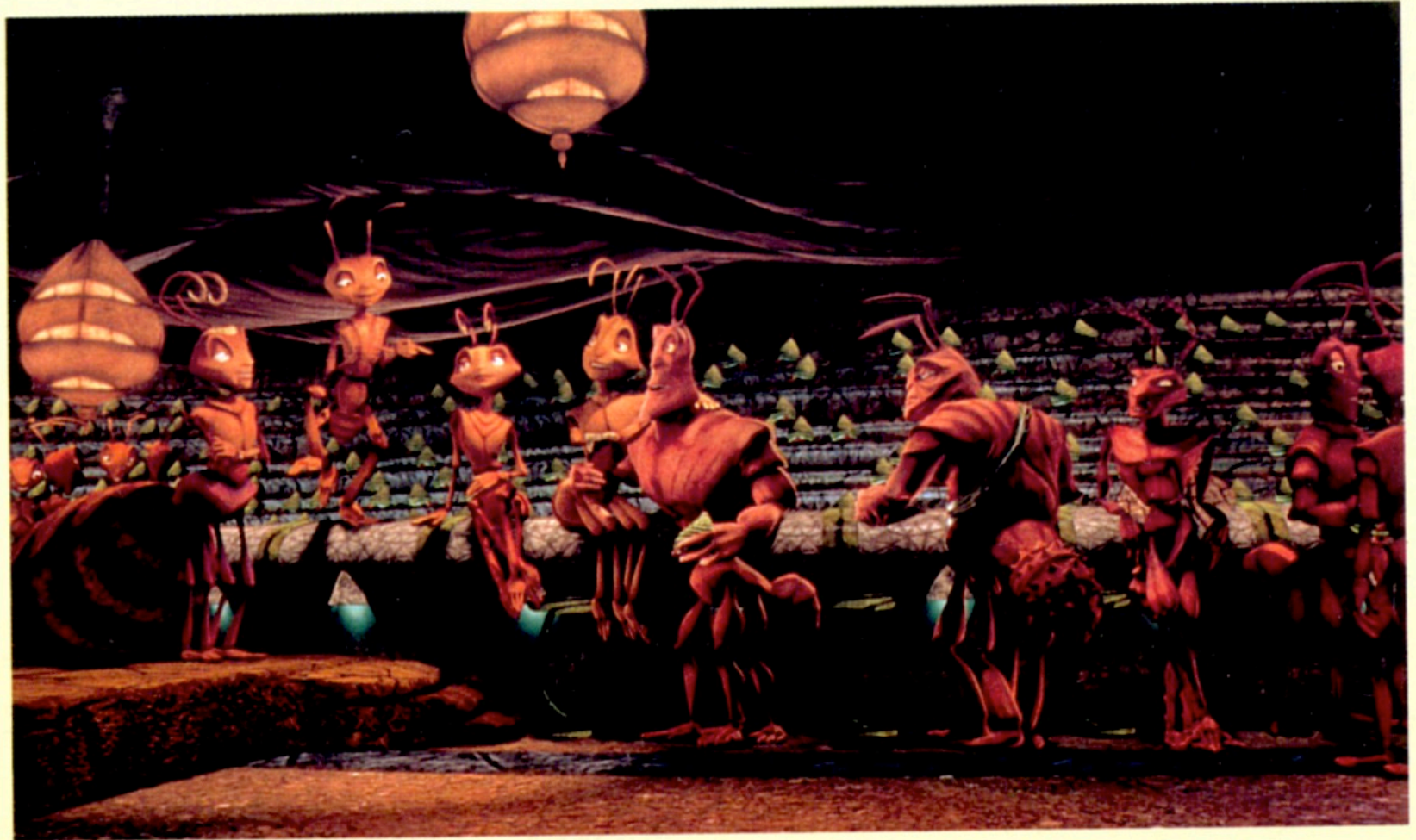
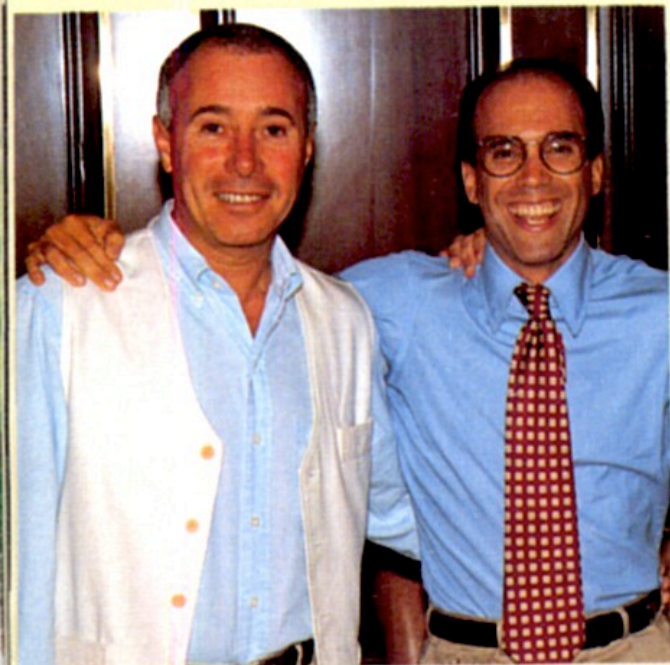
*Trying to surpass the Mouse House.*

**B**y now, Jeffrey Katzenberg probably qualifies as an old pro on the topic of terrifying experiences. In 1994, the wiry, Diet Coke-fueled executive went mano-a-mano with the biggest ears at the Walt Disney Company, chairman Michael Eisner, his boss. After Disney's President Frank Wells died in 1994, Katzenberg practically campaigned for the position, figuring that his amazing success as head of Disney's revived animation division qualified him for the job.

But the Big Ears turned a cold shoulder to Katzenberg, who wasted little time in hooking up with two other industry kingpins, David Geffen and Steven Spielberg, to create DreamWorks SKG, the first new, fully integrated studio in decades. The trio raised \$2 billion just to start up; Katzenberg himself reportedly mortgaged all three of his homes to pony up his third of the initial investment. (Movie mogul Spielberg and record mogul Geffen probably took their shares out of petty cash boxes.)

So far, the DreamWorks movie scoreboard hasn't impressed anyone. Its first offering, *THE PEACEMAKER* didn't even make back its reported \$50 million budget. Spielberg's artsy *AMISTAD* barely broke even. *MOUSE*

#5: Katzenberg (r), seen with DreamWorks partner David Geffen, mounted a formidable opposition to Disney.



DreamWorks' computer-animated *ANTZ* didn't surpass Disney, but it came closer than any other rival effort.

*HUNT* took in \$62 million on a \$40 million budget. *SMALL SOLDIERS* lost money, leaving *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* (\$210 million projected income) and the all-CGI *ANTZ* (\$84 million) as the company's only big winners.

That put extra pressure on Katzenberg and his team to make the more adult-oriented *PRINCE OF EGYPT* not only a critical triumph but also a box office hit. The movie breaks with the animation marketing tradition of cross-promotional deals with fast-food restaurants and toy merchandising, which DreamWorks nixed because of the seriousness of the religious subject matter. (DreamWorks promoted the movie in only two ways: with books and/or audio recordings, and through the release of three CDs done in three different musical styles: *PRINCE OF EGYPT* soundtrack, *PRINCE OF EGYPT* Nashville and *PRINCE OF EGYPT* Inspirational. "Music seemed to be the most suitable way for us to promote this film," Katzenberg said. Besides, the film lacked the usual array of fuzzy, funny sidekicks

that would be natural spin-offs for merchandising.) The gambit apparently paid off. Although the film seems likely to fall short of blockbuster status (usually signified by passing the \$100-million mark domestically), it surpassed the gross of *ANTZ* to reach the \$90-million level.

The idea for a tale about Moses came up, Katzenberg said, at a meeting in Spielberg's home before DreamWorks had been created and named. Going through ideas, Spielberg suggested to Katzenberg that he do his first animated film on the Ten Commandments. The idea stuck. "The purpose of the whole movie is to bring a painting to life," Katzenberg said. "That is what this film is meant to do. We used the design of Gustave Dore in terms of the incredible sense of detail, lighting and composition; and Claude Monet in terms of the impressionistic style. The idea for the artist was to take fine art and make it life-like, as opposed to a cartoon, or highly exaggerated. We wanted something between that and live action, sort of a 'tweener.'

"The big idea in forming DreamWorks animation was to take this animation technique that for 70 years has been used to tell one kind of story in one kind of style—fairy tales, Disney-style—and to take that technique and to do something very different. Fairy tales are only one small genre. Animation can be used with many styles, but 90 percent of animation has been fairy tales. We wanted to change that."

At the beginning, Katzenberg predicted his new company would be "a home for talent." Four years later, is it? At the Four Seasons Hotel in Chicago recently, Katzenberg joined *PRINCE OF EGYPT* director Brenda Chapman, producer Penney Finkelman Cox, art director Kathy Altieri and DreamWorks Records executive Michael Ostin, all of whom testified to the artist-friendly atmosphere created at SKG. All said they didn't really even know how much the movie cost to make.

"Even I don't know exactly what the film cost," Katzenberg said. "And here you have the director, the producer and the art di-



rector of the film, and none of the three really knows what the movie costs. The reason why that's great is that their job is to dream the impossible and go out and do it. There is no money hanging over their heads. There are other people who look after the money. The objective here is to let their imaginations genuinely go wild so they could come up with the biggest, best-est, most incredible thing they could imagine, then go try and execute it. Nobody was standing next to them or was on their backs every day about commerce."

Yet, commerce has been the arena where Katzenberg made his name as head of Disney's animation division. Under Katzenberg, Disney underwent a phenomenal resurrection with hits such as *THE LITTLE MERMAID*, *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*, *ALADDIN* and *THE LION KING*. Now, with his own company, the energetic executive has eclipsed even Eisner as the nearest thing Hollywood has to another real-life Walt Disney.

Just as the Disney Company has done with *ALADDIN* and *LION KING*, DreamWorks intends to create direct-to-video sequels for its theatrical releases, too. *JOSEPH* (without the Technicolor Dream Coat) will be the direct-to-video sequel for *PRINCE OF EGYPT*. Another direct-to-video feature will tell the further adventures of the CGI production *ANTZ*.

DreamWorks has an ambitious slate of theatrical release animated features on the boards as well: *EL-DORADO*, *ASH*, and *SPIRIT OF THE WEST* will be created with traditional animation; *SHREK* and *TUSKER* will be done in CG. Another film that DreamWorks will distribute, *CHICKEN RUN*, is being done in stop-motion by Aardman Animations.

Katzenberg also revealed that DreamWorks has been in contact with Japanimation icon Katsuhiro Otomo, creator of the seminal work *AKIRA* to see if some mutual project could be worked out. "We talked to him about maybe coming to work with us and coming in," Katzenberg said, "but nothing yet."

For the time being, the very future of DreamWorks animation—certainly its direction—seems to have been strengthened by the response to *PRINCE OF EGYPT*. His company's first traditional animated feature merits the highest praise its DreamWorks partner can muster. "I got what I wanted," he said. "I wanted to make a movie that I could look back on and say 'We did our best work.' We got it. We did our best work. Whatever happens, we did our best work."

**Dan Gire**



#16: With *THE TRUMAN SHOW*, Jim Carrey proved he could draw audiences to a smart film but the film still made less money than most of his dumber efforts.

## 9 BOB WEINSTEIN

(Last year: not ranked)

One half of Miramax (along with brother Harvey), Bob Weinstein heads up the company's genre division, Dimension, which has managed to revive the teen horror genre with Kevin Williamson's *SCREAM*, *SCREAM 2*, and *THE FACULTY*. A genre-smart guy, Bob Weinstein's hands-on approach has also attracted a roster of important (if not quite as successful talents), such as Guillermo Del Toro and Robert Rodriguez.

## 10 JOHN LASSETER

(Last year's ranking: 21)

With approximately \$150-million in the U.S., *BUG'S LIFE* proved that *TOY STORY* was no one-shot fluke for Lasseter; the blockbuster box office was all the more impressive since the film opened after DreamWorks' similarly themed *ANTZ*. Next up, Lasseter's Pixar company has *TOY STORY 2*; originally scheduled for DTV release last year, the film was bumped up to theatrical when Disney execs were impressed with the early footage.

## 11 BARBARA BROCCOLI & MICHAEL WILSON

(Last year: not ranked)

Since the death of Albert Broccoli (long-time custodian of the James Bond franchise), these two producers have continued to guide the series to even greater success, turning out two films in the '90s (*TOMORROW NEVER DIES* and *GOLDEN EYE*) that went past the \$100-million mark.

## 12 RICHARD ZANUCK & DAVID BROWN

(Last year: not ranked)

Like Jerry Bruckheimer, this producer team does not specialize in genre material (although they do have hit films like *JAWS* to his credit). Also like Bruckheimer, they ousted *GODZILLA* from its expected box office supremacy with a killer asteroid flick, *DEEP IMPACT*. Although the film's soap opera melodrama fell flat, it captured some of the human element missing from the giant iguana pic, and thus connected with viewers who made it a hit.

## 13 ROLAND EMMERICH & DEAN DEVLIN

(Last year: 2)

What was supposed to be *the* big film of the year turned out to be—well, not a bomb but definitely a disappointment, with a U.S. gross of \$136-million that barely covered the cost of production and distribution. The dynamic duo hardly helped themselves by blaming everyone else—the studio, the press, and the fans—for the negative reaction to the film. After foreign, TV, and video sales, the film will turn a profit; however, Toho (owners of *Godzilla*) dropped a bombshell, announcing plans to proceed with their own version of *Godzilla*, rather than wait for TriStar to complete its planned trilogy. With their *GODZILLA* sequel now on the back burner, Emmerich & Devlin are stepping away from the genre with a revolutionary war film scripted by Robert Rodat (*SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*); in the meantime, they have exec produced the sci-fi themed *13TH FLOOR* and are planning another, *THE MARK*, with Will Smith.

## 14 CHRIS CARTER

(Last year: 9)

*THE X-FILES* feature film did good business last summer, but at \$80-million it fell short of blockbuster status; meanwhile, the show continues to be top in its time slot (although the ratings have slipped a bit from the previous year). Still, the continuing success of the franchise earned Carter a new multi-million dollar deal with Fox, ensuring that he will continue to be a major player, even if his brainchild seems to be doing little beyond retreading old ground.

## 15 RICK BERMAN

(Last year: 8)

Berman managed to pull off the neat trick of producing two good *STAR TREK* films in a row; unfortunately, *STAR TREK: INSURRECTION*'s box office (under \$70-million) failed to surpass its predecessor, *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT*. Still, the new film proved there is continuing life for the *NEXT GENERATION* on the big screen, and the TV shows continue to be strong in syndication.

## 16 JIM CARREY

(Last year's ranking: 10)

*THE TRUMAN SHOW* became a high-brow hit, expanding Carrey's appeal beyond his usual audience. Although its \$126-million U.S. take failed to match that of his previous effort, *LIAR, LIAR*, it proved that his name above the marquee could draw viewers to a challenging piece of science-fiction that otherwise might have had a hard time finding an audience.

Art house favorite Neil Jordan made another foray into big-budget studio filmmaking with *IN DREAMS*.





## 17 GALE ANN HURD ↑

(Last year: 20)

One of the few women working consistently in the genre. Hurd had her biggest hit ever, *ARMAGEDDON*, since parting ways with Jim Cameron. Although the \$200-million success of the asteroid epic is much credited to producer Jerry Bruckheimer (the film clearly resembles his hit action flicks), one hopes that Hurd will get her share of the credit and use it to continue producing solid science-fiction efforts.

## 18 PETER WEIR ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

He made his reputation with imported art house efforts from Australia before moving into U.S. mainstream territory. Last year, he returned to the genre, directing Jim Carrey in his breakthrough hit, *THE TRUMAN SHOW*, turning Andrew Nicole's intelligent, funny, but commercially problematic script into a certifiable blockbuster (\$125-million). We hope Weir uses the resulting clout to give us more fascinating fantasy *a la* early efforts like *PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK* and *THE LAST WAVE*.

## 19 EDDIE MURPHY ↑

(Last year's ranking: 27)

At \$144-million, *DR. DOOLITTLE* became an even bigger hit than *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*. Although *HOLY MAN* tanked, and his attempts to take charge of his career (e.g., *VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN*) have met with less success, Murphy's name can nevertheless insure that a certain kind of fantasy film can get made.

#36: Vincent Ward's *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* was a critically reviled but nonetheless wonderful effort.



#59: John Carpenter directs Thomas Ian Griffith in *VAMPIRES*. Despite disappointing U.S. box office, overseas totals helped re-establish Carpenter's bankability as a director of independent modestly budgeted horror film.

## 20 KEVIN WILLIAMSON ↓

(Last year: 11)

With a U.S. gross of over \$55-million, *HALLOWEEN H20* (which Williamson helped develop) did far better than most horror films but fell short of the success of *SCREAM*. Likewise, *THE FACULTY* squeaked past \$35-million, surpassing most of distributor Dimension's output but failing to equal the grosses of Williamson's own imitators last year (i.e., *URBAN LEGEND* and *I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*). Meanwhile, his multi-pic deal with Dimension is still in effect, and he made his directing debut with *KILLING MRS. TINGLE*.

## 21 MICHAEL CRICHTON ↓

(Last year: 6)

The ready-made supplier of blockbuster movies (thanks to his many best-sellers adapted to the screen) came up short when Barry Levinson's film of *SPHERE* drowned at the box office. Then *THE 13TH WARRIOR*, based on Crichton's novel *Eaters of the Dead*, was delayed for months—never a good sign. Fortunately, Universal has announced that Crichton is collaborating with Spielberg to develop a storyline for a third *JURASSIC PARK* film, which is sure to help him regain his box office ascendancy.

## 22 WES CRAVEN ↓

(Last year: 13)

After the back-to-back success of two *SCREAM* pics, Craven engineered a multi-million dollar deal with Dimension, equivalent to a previous one accorded to Kevin Williamson. This would have boosted Craven's ranking higher, but he chose to exercise his new-found clout by moving away from the genre, directing Meryl Streep in *50 VIOLINS*.

## 23 TOM CRUISE ↓

(Last year's ranking: 16)

After more than a year on Stanley Kubrick's *EYES WIDE SHUT*, Cruise is ready to produce and star in a sequel to *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE*, with John Woo directing. Plus, he plans to star for Steven Spielberg in a big-budget science-fiction effort.

## 24 JOHN TRAVOLTA ↓

(Last year's ranking: 12)

This bankable star and card-carrying Scientologist moved away from starring in genre pics last year, but he finally put together a deal to produce a film version of L. Ron Hubbard's *BATTLEFIELD EARTH*. Travolta will play the leader of the evil alien invaders in the \$70-million independent production, directed by Roger Christian.

## 25 WESLEY SNIPES ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

A fine actor who hadn't had a hit in awhile, Snipes struck it big with *BLADE*, the first film to emerge from his recently formed production company, Amon Ra. The storyline had its weaknesses, but Snipes' taciturn portrayal and martial arts prowess were more than ample compensations. The result was a \$70-million take at the U.S. box office—the most successful of any horror film last year, easily surpassing *SCREAM*-wannabes like *URBAN LEGEND*, *I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*, and even *THE FACULTY*. A sequel is all but guaranteed.

## 26 AKIVA GOLDSMAN ↑

(Last year: 37)

As screenwriter, he assisted Joel Schumacher in the degradation of the *BATMAN* franchise, turning *BATMAN FOREVER* and *BATMAN AND ROBIN* into silly camp, but the films made money anyway (\$180-million and \$100-million respectively). His reward: producing and writing New Line's feature film version of *LOST IN SPACE*, the intended launch of a big-screen franchise. Although the result was a disappointment relative to cost, the film still made \$67-million in the U.S., so future sequels are not out of the question.



## 27 JONATHAN FRAKES

(Last year: 26)

Following up his feature-directing debut on *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT*, Frakes turned *STAR TREK: INSURRECTION* into another enjoyable outing. Although the U.S. box office was not quite as strong as expected, the film actually did better business overseas than its predecessor, and Frakes still ranks high on our list, due to his numerous other genre projects: besides hosting the *BEYOND BELIEF* television show, he is producing a made-for-TV movie in the vein of *GHOST* and executive producing the pilot for Fox TV's *ROSWELL HIGH*. On the feature film front, moving beyond *TREK*, he is attached to direct Arnold Schwarzenegger in *TOTAL RECALL 2*.

## 28 JOSS WHEDON

(Last year: 23)

*BUFFY* continues to slay the competition in its time slot, and now *ANGEL* is being spun off into its own series. Whedon has had a hand in scripting several high-profile genre features (*TWISTER*, *TOY STORY*, *WATERWORLD*, and *ALIEN: RESURRECTION*), but it was on the small screen that he earned the clout to control his material. So, despite a multi-pic deal announced last year, he has continued to concentrate on TV.

## 29 JOHN HUGHES

(Last year: 14)

After a handful of genre remakes, including one blockbuster (*101 DALMATIANS*) and one near blockbuster (*FLUBBER*), Hughes sat out last year. He's been too successful to stay idle for long, so expect him back soon.

## 30 ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

(Last year: 18)

His name once all but guaranteed a green light (that's how *TOTAL RECALL* finally got filmed, after years of development hell), but he had to give up on starring in Ridley Scott's proposed \$100-million remake of *I AM LEGEND* after the studio balked at bankrolling the budget. Still, he is starring in the apocalyptic effort, *END OF DAYS*, which should revive his box office clout.

#12

# ZANUCK & BROWN

*Mainstream producers also make a DEEP IMPACT on science-fiction.*

Calling the film "one of the all-time hits" David Brown says *DEEP IMPACT*, which he produced with Richard Zanuck,

has been doing great in terms of box office: "well over three hundred million dollars worldwide, without even the ancillary rights factored in" he says. Obviously pleased with this level of success, he adds wryly, "Any hit has a deep impact, to coin a phrase." One of his first films as producer was the genre title *SSSSSSS* (1973; also with Zanuck) in which a college student gets hired by a doctor who is brewing up a serum that can transform a human into a King Cobra snake. Brown went on to make *COCOON* (along with Zanuck, Robert Doudell and Lili Fini Zanuck) and *JAWS*, but, he notes, the partners are "not genre producers, as a rule. We produce what we like." Brown's many other films, with various co-producers, include *JAWS 2*, *THE VERDICT*, *TARGET*, *DRIVING MISS DAISY*, *RICH IN LOVE*, *THE CEMETERY CLUB*, *CANADIAN BACON*, *KISS THE GIRLS*, and *THE SAINT*, and the miniseries *A SEASON IN PURGATORY*. He spoke briefly from his New York



A meteorite descends upon hapless humans trying to escape to safer ground in *DEEP IMPACT*, the surprisingly successful disaster movie soap opera.

office, in the middle of last minute preparations before his trip to Ireland for the shooting of *ANGELA'S ASHES*. Brown said that fantasy and science fiction elements have been part of "not too many" of his films: "*THE STING* is not a fantasy. Maybe it is to some people, a fable. *JAWS* is not. *A FEW GOOD MEN* is not. *THE PLAYER* is not. *COCOON* would be one." But, he says, the genre of a film is not what he looks at: "I go

after whatever appeals to me at the time." Another upcoming film is *ALONG CAME A SPIDER*, a thriller with Morgan Freeman, based on another of James Patterson's novels, who wrote the story from which Brown's film *KISS THE GIRLS* was adapted.

Commenting more on *DEEP IMPACT*, produced with Zanuck, Spielberg and Joan Bradshaw (*CONTACT*), Brown says "I never thought of it as a fantasy. The key word about the film, which Mr. Spielberg pronounced at the beginning of the project, is it must be realistic. It's not like *INDEPENDENCE DAY*. It's realism. It's a hypothetical, but realistic film." But, he agrees, it does have sci-fi elements, and declares he has always been interested in science fiction, "ever since I used to read the magazine called *Amazing Stories*, edited by the late Hugo Gernsback. But I've not produced many [sci-fi films]." Asked if he'd like to do more in the future, Brown says he would, "But always with the caveat if I like the story. That is always, always the emphasis. I don't go after a genre, I go after a specific story."

Douglas Eby

#12: producers David Brown (center) Richard Zanuck (right), the team who gave us *JAWS*, confer with director Mimi Leder on the set of *DEEP IMPACT*.





## 31 ROBIN WILLIAMS

(Last year: 19)

After some real genre dogs (HOOK, JUMANJI, JACK, FLUBBER), Williams finally starred in a great fantasy film, WHAT DREAMS MAY COME; however, the box office failed to match his earlier, bad efforts—a true injustice. He receives added demerit points for going on THE TONIGHT SHOW and almost completely ignoring the movie. Guess that Oscar for GOOD WILL HUNTING went to his head, and now he only wants to plug sentimental would-be Oscar-bait like PATCH ADAMS.

## 32 JOHN WOO

(Last year: not ranked)

This high-powered action director turned in one of the best and most successful science-fiction films of late with FACE/OFF two years ago. Now, he tries his hand at helming Tom Cruise's MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE sequel. Woo might rank higher if he decides to embrace the genre on a regular basis; so far, it has been a mere tangent in his career.

## 33 JOEL SCHUMACHER

(Last year: 17)

BATMAN AND ROBIN made over \$100-million in the U.S., but that total was weak relative to the budget, and scathing critical notices pegged the film as a failure, helping to push any sequel onto the back burner. Meanwhile, Schumacher attempted to regain critical esteem by directing 8MM, from a script by Andrew Kevin Walker. Whether he'll be given another chance at the caped crusader remains to be seen.

## 34 LUC BESSON

(Last year: not ranked)

THE FIFTH ELEMENT did only a respectable \$67-million in the U.S. a couple of years ago, but it was a blockbuster abroad; because of this international success, Besson remains a director who can put together financing deals to get his films made. Up next is a bio-pic of Joan of Arc—a true life story that nevertheless contains elements that should appeal to fans of fantasy cinema.

continued on page 35

#10

# JOHN LASSETER

*It's a wonderful bug's life for CGI-director John Lasseter.*

**A**fter only five short films and two features, John Lasseter has already collected two Oscars and become one of the biggest names in contemporary animation. Lasseter's latest film, A BUG'S LIFE is approaching the \$190-million gross of TOY STORY, making it the financial winner in the battle between A BUG'S LIFE and Dreamworks' ANTZ.

Lasseter's clout was effectively demonstrated two years ago, when Pixar re-negotiated its distribution deal with Disney. As part of the new deal, Disney insisted on a seven year contract and also agreed to pay half of Lasseter's new salary, as well as giving him a hefty signing bonus of reportedly over \$1 million. In addition, Lasseter is in the very unique position of being not only a highly valued director but the top creative executive at Pixar, as well. In this capacity, Lasseter will oversee all of Pixar's upcoming features, including those he's not directing, such as the upcoming TOY STORY 2 and HIDDEN VALLEY. Ed Catmull, Pixar's executive vice-president explained, "John is our lead creative person. For each of our films he is the person who has the final say so, and that's not always the way it works at other studios. At Pixar, we have filmmakers who make the films and do the artistic part, without executives telling them what to do. We don't come in and say, 'This is what the next film is going to be.' When we think about new ideas, although they get pitched to all of us, John is the one who



John Lasseter followed up TOY STORY with another CGI blockbuster, A BUG'S LIFE.

takes the lead. He works with a team of talented story people, who are his confidants: Andrew Stanton, Joe Ranft, Pete Docter, and some others who are all collaborating on ideas. So it's not like John goes off by himself. It's a story team that sits and talk about things and reaches a consensus."

This working method is no doubt much more appealing to top artistic talent, than at a company like Dreamworks, where chief executive Jeffrey Katzenberg is known to supervise nearly every aspect of an animated film. As one leading animation director explained, "Directors don't really get to direct when Jeffrey Katzenberg is in charge. He directs the voice sessions, and his hands are all over everything. He's had huge successes at Disney, and takes a lot of credit for what they achieved—although I wouldn't know about that."

Lasseter, in contrast believes there's plenty of glory to be shared, and likes to give his collaborators creative ownership

of the shots. He also goes out of his way to credit his co-workers, noting that it's the people, not the technology, that are at the heart of the Pixar success story. Lasseter even gave his second in command, Andrew Stanton a credit as co-director on A BUG'S LIFE. "The buck still stops with John," explained Stanton, "but we discovered we get to a better solution by collaborating and bouncing ideas back and forth. We're actually in on all the meetings together, and we rarely split stuff up, because it's a collaborative teaming. About 40% of the

time we think very differently, but we compliment each other for doing that. There's that Lennon-McCartney thing going on. The nice thing is we have a secure enough confidence in each other, so we can let the best idea win out."

At the Silicon Valley premiere of A BUG'S LIFE, Lasseter told a cadre of high-tech industry guests how he first came to work at Pixar. "Ed Catmull was the one who hired me," related Lasseter. "Ed was still at Lucasfilm, and he couldn't hire an animator, because we were a R & D division, so he hired me as an interface designer. For the first two years I was working at Lucasfilm, I was an interface designer, even though I was helping design the animation system and doing all the animation. But Ed had a vision of some day doing a feature film in computer animation. And the first day I was at Lucasfilm, I asked Ed how he got all these talented people to come to work with him. Ed said, 'It was very simple. I just tried to hire people who were smarter than me.'





TOY STORY 2, originally planned as a direct-to-video sequel to the blockbuster hit, will go theatrical.

That statement has become a core of the way I work at Pixar. I realized that it isn't about the technology: it's not about how fast your computers can go; it's about the people you have working with you. Don't get me wrong: I thank everyone for all the great computers they've developed, but it's similar to the way an animated film shouldn't be about how great something looks; it should be about the story and the characters. The same goes for our studio. I feel I am the luckiest guy in the world, to be one of the artists who gets to use all these amazing tools—and the work we do at Pixar is really a product of these brilliant tools—but the tools are being put to use by all these amazing and talented people. When we were talking about Ed's hiring philosophy—how he kept hiring more and more people that were smarter than him, it was funny, because now Ed is feeling like one of the dumbest people at Pixar!"

Lasseter went on to describe how Apple founder Steve Jobs eventually acquired Pixar from George Lucas. "We were all working at Lucasfilm," recalled Lasseter, "and this supposed boy genius from Silicon Valley, who had just gotten fired from Apple, was coming up to take a look at us, to see if he was interesting in buying us. At the time, there were only 40 of us. Steve looked at us, and what impressed him most was not the technology we were working

with but the people. So he ended up buying us, and continued to invest his money in us, hoping that one day he might get some sort of return on his investment. He had to wait for ten years until we had our first hit with TOY STORY, but until then, he supported us. That's sort of amazing, because in today's business market, everyone wants an immediate return on their investment."

Certainly one of the secrets of Lasseter's success is his seemingly boundless enthusiasm. Unlike many contemporary directors who have a cynical or world weary vision, Lasseter is a director with a true sense of wonder. "People often ask me how I can keep my enthusiasm up after working for four years on a film," he said, "but I can honestly say, I see something new

every day. When we show dailies, and the whole studio shows up, it's so fun, because it's like we're seeing the shots for the first time, even though we've created the shots. But to see it on film for the first time (as opposed to the computer monitors), on certain shots, it just takes your breath away. That completely inspires you, and keeps you inspired the entire way."

Steve Jobs calls Lasseter, "the closest thing we have to Walt Disney today." That opinion is echoed by several people in Hollywood who are less biased, including stop-motion director Henry Selick, who said, "John Lasseter and Nick Park are the new Walt Disneys of animation. I don't think anyone can touch those two guys in terms of having a personal vision that's also very commercial—and

they're both brilliant storytellers. One does it with CGI, one with stop-motion, but the medium is actually secondary to their vision. The heart of what they do is in their storytelling, their imagination and their inventiveness." Veteran Warner Brothers animator Chuck Jones calls Lasseter, "a genius."

With praise like this, and two huge hits behind him, Lasseter could easily succumb to the Hollywood trap brought on by enormous success, but at the moment that appears to be a very remote possibility, because Lasseter is fully aware of his responsibilities as a filmmaker, and makes pleasing the audience his primary goal. As James Stewart, the populist hero of many of the Frank Capra movies that inspired Lasseter, observed, "The audience is your life. I think that if someone is unable to treat the audience as their partners, it's wrong." It's a sentiment shared by Lasseter, who said, "I want the audience to be satisfied when they give me 90 minutes out of their life. I don't want them to feel cheated, but to feel that it was worth their time."

For the future Lasseter plans on directing "until they have to drag me away," but notes that each film will still take four years to complete, since it takes a minimum of two years just to get a story whipped into shape. "We're always stressing story, story, story," he maintained. "We want to make really good movies, with great characters and not have a wasted thing in them."

Lawrence French

A BUG'S LIFE emerged as the clear financial victor in the duel between the Disney-Pixar effort and Dreamworks' ANTZ.





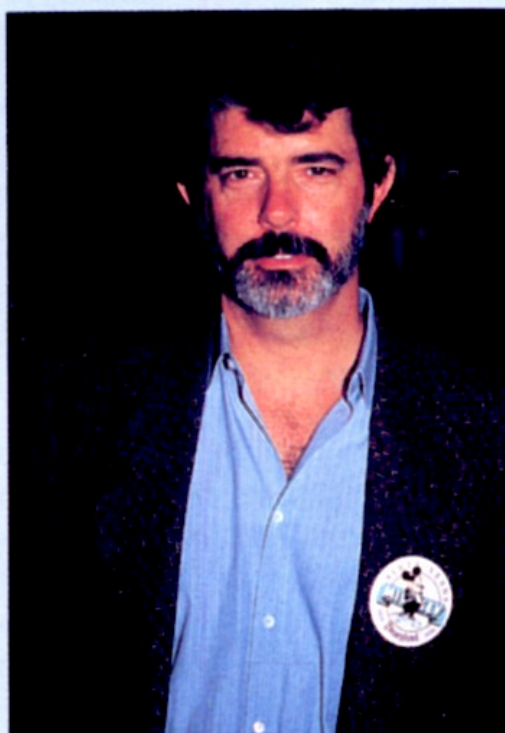
#1

# GEORGE LUCAS

*The most powerful Force in the galaxy.*

By Lawrence French

With the upcoming release of *THE PHANTOM MENACE*, Episode One in the *STAR WARS* saga, George Lucas reclaims his throne as the most powerful and influential filmmaker in the Galaxy. However, Lucas remains uncommonly modest about his staggering success, saying, "*THE PHANTOM MENACE* is only my fourth film as a director. I'm just a young director; I haven't really come that far yet." And when one thinks about it, what seems like a dramatic understatement, is in reality quite accurate, since Lucas' vast empire is really based on only two properties: *STAR WARS* and *INDIANA JONES*. Since 1977, it is these two franchises alone that have generated the billions of dollars of merchandising, sequels, theme park rides, and TV shows that have made Lucas famous and fabulously wealthy (*Forbes* estimates his worth at \$2 billion). Strangely, none of Lucas' other film projects has ever come close to the success of his core franchises;

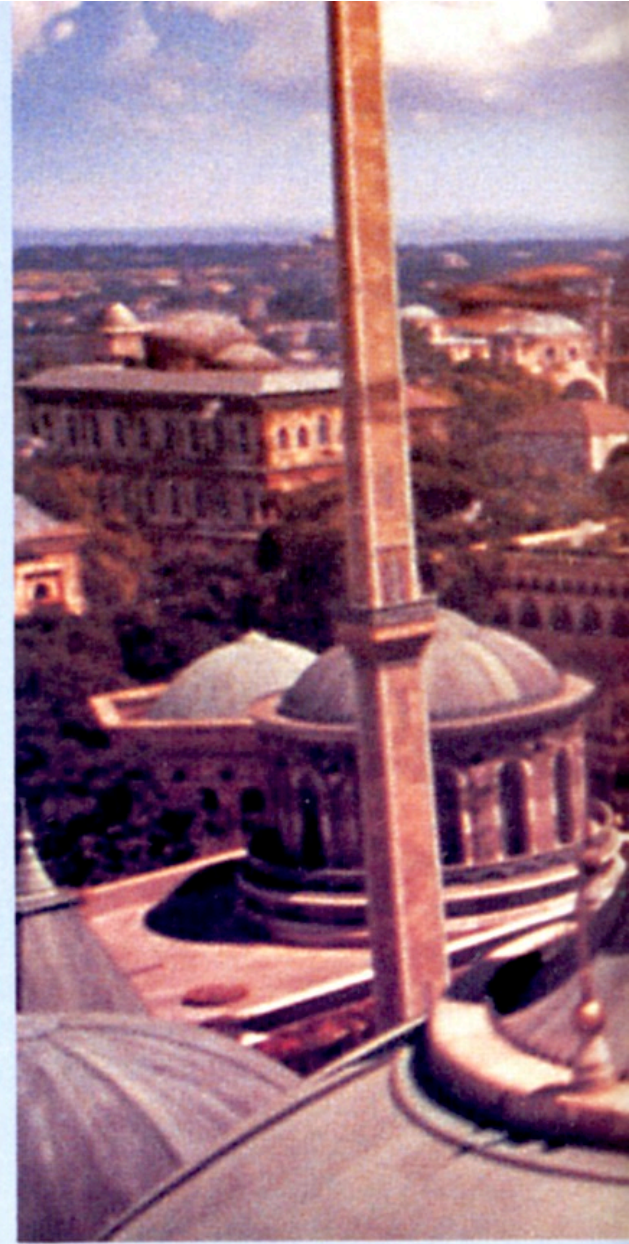


#1: Despite a small output of films, George Lucas claims the top spot, thanks to the *STAR WARS* prequel.

in the past 20 years, the output from Lucasfilm (besides the *STAR WARS* and *INDIANA JONES* trilogies) has amounted to only five films of wildly varying quality: *HOWARD THE DUCK*, *LABYRINTH*, *WILLOW*, *TUCKER*, and *RADIOLAND MURDERS*.

This slim output seems odd from a filmmaker who claims to love making movies. But as the late industry analyst Stuart By-

ron noted in 1982—when he called "George Lucas the most reactionary filmmaker in America"—Lucas often seemed to make contradictory statements about the kinds of films he wanted to make. Back then, Lucas claimed he'd like to do experimental films that didn't have plot or character in the traditional sense but still had an emotional content, and sited *THX-1138* and *MORE AMERICAN GRAFFITI* as two attempts to go in that direction. Lucas also pointed out that once Skywalker Ranch was completed, he would be free to do whatever he wanted. "No matter how far out it is," said Lucas, "and no matter how unacceptable it would be to an audience, I can do it, and if I like it, I'll try to get it shown." Somehow these experimental films never materialized, as Lucas understandably kept going back to the tried and true franchise formulas that were sure to please crowds. But recently he told *The Star Wars Insider* that his work on *THE PHANTOM MENACE* was not going to be traditional. "I'm doing things



Above: the emperor's home world.

that in certain cases might be unconventional," he claimed. "I might get killed for it, but I'm making it the way I want to make it." However, it appears Lucas won't be veering too far from expectations, as he also stated, "I'm doing very stylistic ideas, things that are very musical in terms of how I develop themes, and repeat themes. I go do the same thing over and over in certain areas to echo what I have done before."

There was also a time when Lucas talked about sponsoring filmmakers whose vision was not commercial in the Hollywood sense. Talking to *Rolling Stone* in 1980, one of the reasons Lucas gave for building Skywalker Ranch, was to recreate the kind of atmosphere found in film schools, an environment where people interested in films could exchange ideas and help each other at the same time.

After his huge success, it should have been simple for Lucas to use his immense clout to get difficult film projects rolling at other studios—something that he has rarely done. This would seem to be understandable, in light of a joke that Herb Caen reported was once popular among the employees at Skywalker Ranch: "How does George Lucas screw in a light

Jar Jar, a computer-generated comic relief creature, joins Liam Neeson and Ewan McGregor for a wild ride.







This CGI city on the evil emperor's home planet, introduced in the retooled RETURN OF THE JEDI, is seen again in the highly anticipated new film.

bulb?" Answer: "He doesn't. He just holds it up, and the world revolves around *him*." That sentiment is echoed by THE PHANTOM MENACE's producer, Rick McCallum, who told *The Star Wars Insider* that "with some film directors you have a totally collaborative involvement, but on STAR WARS we don't question what George wants; we just do it."

Although neither Lucasfilm nor Lucas himself has generated a large body of work, there is little doubt that his influence has been immense, especially in advancing film technology. Industrial Light and Magic has been the leading innovator of special effects work, and Lucasfilm has been responsible for many of the major technological breakthroughs in sound, theater presentation, film editing, and various digital technologies. In 1993, shortly after ILM's CGI dinosaurs for JURASSIC PARK proved to be an astounding triumph, Lucas held a press conference to announce a partnership with Silicon Graphics named JEDI (Joint Environment for Digital Imaging). Lucas predicted then that computers would change the way motion pictures are made. "The world of special effects and the world of production are merging into one

entity," he said. "Computers will allow filmmakers to manipulate images, the way a painter or sculptor would manipulate his work." Of course, this is exactly what Lucas hopes to accomplish with THE PHANTOM MENACE, which will hit screens on May 21. Nearly every shot in the film will be enhanced with some sort of digital trickery; several settings and characters are going to be made entirely in the computer. In fact, Lucas claims that the second or third film of the trilogy will be made without film at all. "We've been doing a lot of research and development, working closely with some of the electronic companies,"

commented Lucas, "so hopefully, we can shoot the next film electronically, rather than using film." It's a claim that may be slightly optimistic, since Lucas said the same thing in 1983, after making RETURN OF THE JEDI. He felt shooting and editing movies on 35mm film was far too cumbersome. "Anybody who has torn sprocket holes," noted Lucas, "or tried to show a first rough cut knows the only thing they worry about is if the film is going to break. I haven't touched a piece of film for years." Now, it appears that creating a completely photo-realistic feature film is a distinct possibility, but may still be farther in the future than Lucas is antic-

ipating. And on THE PHANTOM MENACE, Lucas was still obliged to build many real sets and go on location to get backgrounds that would be impossible to create in the computer. For instance, Lucas chose to shoot at the ornate Caserta Royal Palace, outside of Naples, for scenes in the movie that will take place on the home planet of the young Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman). At a press conference in Caserta, Lucas explained why shots like the Royal Palace still needed to be filmed on location. "The Palace is an incredible piece of architecture," he said, "and to try to create it digitally would take a vast amount of work, so it's much easier to take advantage of something that already exists, rather than to try to reproduce it digitally."

One of the primary reasons Lucas is embracing the new digital technology is the allowances it makes for changing things late in the filmmaking process. Normally, after a director shoots and edits a rough cut, there is little chance of adding any new scenes or ideas that may present themselves during shooting. With digital techniques, this can all be accomplished fairly simply. Multiple takes of the same shot can be separated and then

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The first STAR WARS trilogy betrayed the influence of Akira Kurasawa's samurai films; THE PHANTOM MENACE borrows from the look of Hong Kong fant-asia.





#15

# RICK BERMAN

*Science-fiction's premier franchise keeps on trekkin'.*

By Dennis Fischer

The rigors of producing one television series has burned out more than one creative talent, but Rick Berman has been simultaneously producing STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE and STAR TREK: VOYAGER, while overseeing production of the NEXT GENERATION STAR TREK movies. He has been shepherding STAR TREK for over a decade now. A former vice president of Paramount Network Television, he was invited by Gene Roddenberry to help produce STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION, and there is no question that his involvement was a major turning point in the show, which dramatically improved during its third and fourth seasons.

He recently discussed the two-year process that led to STAR TREK: INSURRECTION, which was greenlighted after Paramount discovered an upsurge in the popularity of STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT in foreign markets. Said Berman, "The previous STAR TREK films—I think maybe with the exception of the first

Berman (l) confers with director Jonathan Frakes on location, filming STAR TREK: INSURRECTION.



After a weak start with STAR TREK: GENERATIONS, Rick Berman got the Next Generation film franchise going with FIRST CONTACT, guest starring Alice Krige.

one—did not translate very well in most foreign markets. They always did very well in Great Britain and Germany, where the series was popular, and a couple of other markets: Japan, Australia, Brazil. But [Paramount] never could rely on making a lot of money overseas.

"I think that Paramount made a big effort with FIRST CONTACT. We're living in a world now where the foreign distribution of movies is much more important than it used to be...with many movies more important than the domestic release, so I think Paramount decided that they would go all out to muster up interest. I think the results were very successful. They doubled their gross. I can't tell you they didn't also double their expenses and their marketing—they very well might have—but I think that they did that in the hopes that those who went and saw FIRST CONTACT would have some kind of built-in familiarity."

Berman's concern for the new STAR TREK film was that

it be dramatically different from the last one. He said, "The writer [Michael Piller] and I decided that the one thing we weren't going to do was out-Borg the Borg. We had created such a great story last time with the Borg, and we found ourselves saying, 'This time we don't want to save Earth; we don't want terrible creatures; and we don't want to deal with time travel. It would be too derivative, so we've got to come up with something else.'"

"I also didn't want to work with the same writers again," he added. "Not that I don't love them and work with them constantly on the television shows, but Ron Moore and Brannon Braga were very ensconced in the two television series, and I didn't want to split up their time as much as we had been forced to do on FIRST CONTACT."

According to Berman, it takes five or six months to develop the story for one of the films. "We worked every day on it," he said, "and Patrick [Stewart] got involved toward the

end, and Brent Spiner certainly had thoughts about it, and the studio had thoughts, so you go down a lot of different routes and dead ends and come back, many different things went into coming up with it."

Berman has sought to remain true to Roddenberry's vision of the future, which is not without its difficulties. As Berman explained, "One of the things that used to drive the writers crazy about Roddenberry is that he believed this cast of characters were better humans than we are, that 24th century humans were beyond petty bickering and the kind of conflict that we have in our world today. The problem is when you are writing drama, if you don't have conflict between characters, the conflict always has to come from outside. So we have tried with the various series and movies to develop conflict within the characters. In DEEP SPACE NINE, we do it by having a lot of characters that are not Starfleet. We try to do it in different ways in VOYAGER, and we try to do it in different ways in the films, but it is difficult to deal with a palette of perfect people. It's real boring. Thank God we've got a spaceship to go places where we can find some conflict."

Berman discounts claims that the STAR TREK franchise is losing popularity as the ratings are less than they had been before. "The franchise is a very wide area," he said. "Certainly the two television shows on the air now in the United States, their ratings are not what they were five or ten years ago. But this is also a factor of a number of things. When THE NEXT GENERATION went on the air in 1987, it was the only science fiction show on television. There are dozens of them now.

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## 35 PAUL VERHOEVEN ↓

(Last year: 17)

The box office disappointment of *STARSHIP TROOPERS* nixed any potential for a sequel, but that hasn't stopped Verhoeven's career. He is already set to direct his next big-budget genre film, *THE HOLLOW MAN*.

## 36 VINCENT VARD ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

After art house hits *THE NAVIGATOR* and *MAP OF THE HUMAN HEART*, former critical supporters refused to forgive this director for going mainstream with his first U.S. studio film, *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*. Despite scathing reviews, the film earned \$56-million in the U.S.—not what was expected, but still the best yet for new, struggling distributor Polygram.

## 37 DAVID FINCHER ↓

(Last year: 24)

*SEVEN* elevated him to the level of blockbuster Hollywood director—a level that *THE GAME* failed to match two years ago, with its \$48-million U.S. gross. Now, Fincher is in the process of starting up his next project, which might or might not be in the genre.

## 38 JOEL SILVER ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

This producer's genre efforts have been mixed: *PREDATOR* and *DEMOLITION MAN* were hits; *PREDATOR 2* was a disappointment, and *THE LAST ACTION HERO* was a flop. *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* was a hit on HBO, but the film series died out after two entries. Nevertheless, Silver enjoys considerable cache in this industry because of action blockbusters like *DIE HARD*. Now, he has returned to science-fiction with *THE MATRIX*, a cyberbunk extravaganza that could please both audiences and critics.

## 39 MICHAEL PILLER ↓

(Last year: 38)

*INSURRECTION* turned out to be an enjoyable *STAR TREK* feature that brought some of the best qualities of the *NEXT GENERATION* to the big screen,

# #26

# JONATHAN FRAKES

*When it comes to directing the Next Generation, he's proven to be #1.*

*By Dennis Fischer*

*STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT* became the highest grossing of all the *TREK* features, establishing Jonathan Frakes as a feature film director after having directed several episodes of *THE NEXT GENERATION*, *DEEP SPACE NINE*, and *VOYAGER*. He has been signed to direct *TOTAL RECALL 2*, which will go into production whenever Arnold Schwarzenegger can fit it into his schedule. Frakes is also executive producer for the Fox Television pilot *ROSWELL HIGH*, and is currently developing various film and television projects for his company Goepp Circle Productions, which is based at Paramount with partner Lisa J. Olin. He also serves as the ongoing host of the Fox series *BEYOND BELIEF: FACT OR FICTION*.

Frakes feels that *STAR TREK: INSURRECTION*, with its ethical and moral concerns, returns the series more into the realm of Roddenberry's *STAR TREK*. "We in the beginning had decided that the Prime Directive was something that needed to be at the core of the movie," he said, "and in the greatest tradition of Gene's *STAR TREK*, when *STAR TREK* worked best. How many does it take? You cannot sacrifice the needs of the few for the needs of the many."

One of the goals for *INSURRECTION* was to make it a lighter, more humorous film than *FIRST CONTACT*. Explained Frakes, "One of the marching orders was to try and do a movie that was majorly different from *FIRST CONTACT*. *FIRST CONTACT* was essentially a horror movie; it was claustrophobic and dark.



#26: Jonathan Frakes has spun his *TREK* directing gig into a separate career, landing the job of helming *TOTAL RECALL 2* with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

This one is a big action-adventure movie, but it really is a romance. Also the storyline lends itself to that kind of behavior, and the Trekkers have been complaining that the Riker-Troi relationship has been swept under the carpet, and now it's resurfaced. For the non-Trekkers, it's just nice that these two characters get together."

*INSURRECTION* went back for some reshoots after initial audience screenings. Frakes explained that essentially, "the ending has always been the same, the tag of when the girls come back down the hill and Patrick and Anij have their little walk, and Brent and the boy have their haystack, that was always there. Prior to that, it was just Murray and Patrick, mano-

a-mano, in the Collector. The Collector didn't blow up. Riker didn't come in and save the day with the Enterprise. Worf's ship, or rather the Son'a's ship, was not retaken by the bad guys. In the old ending, Patrick and Murray are on the inside of that Collector, and they fight to get to the ejector, and at the end Murray gets in it and gets shot out into those rings of metaphysic energy, and he morphs from old Ruafo back through Murray Abraham back to [a younger actor credited in the film but not on screen] back to a kid. In the new ending, we blow the Collector up with Murray in it, and he's toast. I like the new ending better. They were right."

Frakes is aware that *TREK* fans are not uncritically accept-



ing. "It's actually not a given thing that fans will like the movie," he said. "The problem with Trekkers is that they are very strict. They want their action-adventure; they want their heroes heroic, and yet I think a lot of STAR TREK is that sort of political, philosophical stuff that's mixed in without brow-beating. I don't think there's any future in second-guessing [what fans want], but I don't think there's any future in short-changing them either. I think we have to give the Trekkers what they want, and then whatever else we can."

Frakes is also aware that TREK fans are not monolithic, and that all fans do not necessarily want the same things. "It depends on the Trekker," he observes. "There are two really strong factions. There's always one group that says, 'I want more action, and I want it to be more like Kirk where they blow shit up.' The other is that we like the Picard Enterprise where it is a little more cerebral stuff."

Frakes discounts some premature proclamations that the TREK franchise is losing popularity. "We're changing all that with this movie," he asserted. "At the beginning of the year, that seemed to be a bandwagon people were getting on just because it was easy, because [it was] based on the TV shows numbers not doing as well as THE NEXT GENERATION's numbers, but I think that's been in general on television, across the board, that everybody's numbers have gone down. FRIENDS' numbers have gone down, so I don't think that's very well founded in that regard. I think DEEP SPACE is probably having their best season ever. And this movie, I get the feeling, is going to wipe a lot of that feeling away."

Like the rest of the NEXT GENERATION cast, Frakes is grateful for the opportunities and recognition that STAR TREK has afforded him and does not feel that his association has resulted in typecasting. "It's been great to us," said Frakes. "I'm not on to poo-poo STAR TREK. Not at all. I mean, it's given me my house. I suspect that it's a place we'll come back to. I'm assuming in two or three years Paramount is going to



Jonathan Frakes (right) directs actor Patrick Stewart as Jean Luc Picard in an early humorous scene aboard the enterprise in STAR TREK: INSURRECTION.

want to make another movie. We've been luckier, I think, than the original crew in many ways. We've all been able to go out and do other stuff, and then come back to work on the Enterprise. That's a really great situation. I'd be happy to go back to STAR TREK. I was one of the people who wasn't so thrilled to see the show cancelled. I like to have a steady gig. There's a lot to be said for that going to work knowing what you're doing for the next ten months."

In ruminating on the show's appeal, Frakes said, "I think Gene created a century, 23rd century for the original show, where there was no greed. People treated each other civilly and with respect—you know what I mean? That's one of the things that Rick has maintained, that sort of honorable approach to the aliens, to other races. It's the core conflict of this movie, and it's also the thing that has made STAR TREK endure, whether people consciously get that or they subconsciously get that. I hope that when and if we do make it to the 23rd century, that we be that civil."

Regarding on how he thinks Roddenberry would react to the modern incarnations of TREK, Frakes said, "I think there are times when he would be scowling. I don't think this movie would be one of those times. I have a feeling that this is in a real Gene Roddenberry STAR TREK tradition. I think it does what STAR TREK has historically done best, which is address contemporary issues and couch them in the 24th century,

so the audience doesn't feel like they are being lectured to or at. They either get the message or leave the theater saying, does this remind you of the Middle East or does this remind you of the Native American problem? If you're not pounded over the head with it, which I don't think you are, Roddenberry would be very pleased. He also liked romance. Kirk was his main man, so Kirk did very well. Riker was a poor man's Kirk. He did pretty well this time."

Frakes also had the experience of directing the CD-ROM, STAR TREK: KLINGON. In describing it, he said, "That's a whole different animal because everything is linear. You can't cover a scene and edit it because it's from the point of view of the player. You have to plan your shots to be two or three minutes long till you can cut to a set piece or something like that, and then you cut back. It's very tedious. Takes a lot of planning and rehearsal."

Frakes loves to sing and does not think that a STAR TREK musical is too ridiculous an idea. "I actually think, and it's not too farfetched an idea, that a musical would be fabulous thing," he said. "Jerry Goldsmith has been contacted to write a STAR TREK opera, but just can't find the time. I guess to write an opera is a year of your life or more. But it has the kind of scope that an opera could hold, and God knows, we all like to sing."

Frakes will return to hosting BEYOND BELIEF beginning in January of this year. "I'm just

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including the idealism that has always been at the heart of TREK's popularity. Unfortunately, the film didn't achieve the box office critical mass one would have expected; it will take a bigger hit to help Piller escape from TREK and get a chance to write his own big-screen projects.

## 40 JOE DANTE ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

Dante's career had been foundering since hitting a box office high with GREMLINS (\$148-million) in 1984. Fortunately, old pal Steven Spielberg tapped him to helm SMALL SOLDIERS (sort of GREMLINS meets TOY STORY), which earned a respectable \$55-million at the domestic box office. That's not the kind of money that will have Hollywood lining up to finance Dante's next dream project, but it is enough to re-establish him as a bankable director of fantasy films.

## 41 STOKELY CHAFIN ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

Riding the SCREAM wave, Chafin and company turned I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER into a \$70-million success two years ago. However, the sequel fell short, barely stretching to the \$40-million mark domestically. That's enough to turn a profit on a modest budget, but one wonders whether the teen terror cycle is burning out already.

## 42 GEORGE MILLER ↓

(Last year: 28)

Miller produced and co-wrote the sleeper hit BABE, but when he stepped into the director's chair for BABE: PIG IN THE CITY, he delivered a \$90-million dollar movie that earned less than \$20-million, bringing the franchise to an instant close. Fortunately, Miller's next project is already in development: another sequel to MAD MAX.

## 43 TERRY GILLIAM ↓

(Last year: 31)

For some reason, the box office success of 12 MONKEYS wasn't enough to get the green light for THE DEFECTIVE DETECTIVE, a fantasy Gilliam co-scripted with Richard LaGravenese. Instead,



#13

# DEVLIN & EMMERICH

*GODZILLA proves to be no INDEPENDENCE DAY, but a sequel is still on the way.*

**F**ollowing a year in which the anticipated genre release, *GODZILLA*, was outperformed by a pair of killer asteroid flicks, the natural question to ask Dean Devlin, half of the Centropolis team of Devlin and Roland Emmerich, is what are you up to now?

"We have a bunch of things we're pursuing, but the one that's most in the center of the radar is a project called *THE PATRIOT*, which was written by Robert Rodat, who wrote *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*. It's the story of a man who fought in the militia during the American Revolution. It's a departure from genre, but our hope is to use everything we've learned in special effects to recreate that time in a way that wasn't really possible before. [There are] things we can now do digitally to show landscapes or battle sequences—even the smallest things. Roland and I realized that you've never seen, in a movie, a cannonball fire out of a cannon! You always see this flash and an explosion, even though 90% of those cannonballs never exploded. We're hoping to use the technology to really bring you back to that time."

It's fascinating and surprising to hear that Centropolis is doing a Revolutionary War film. "In all honesty," Devlin admitted, "we didn't expect it either. It was a case where we were sent this script more as a reading sample than anything else. And it was simply the best script Roland and I had ever read."

No chat with Dean Devlin is complete without talking about the 'big guy': *Godzilla*. "It's



**Godzilla stomps through New York in the over-hyped opus from the producer-director team behind *ID4*.**

an amazing situation," claimed Devlin. "It's weird. A movie does what you would dream it would do, and people act as though it was some kind of failure. I think that that's part of being involved with *INDEPENDENCE DAY*. When you're involved in a movie that does that well, everything is going to pale in comparison."

With 20-20 hindsight, Devlin added, "We kind of knew that was going to come. Before the film came out, we all said, 'You realize we could have this gigantic hit, but if it doesn't break every record in the world, people are going to be disappointed.' But we had a lot of fun with it. It did well. The cartoon is doing phenomenally well right now. I'm really proud of it. And we're going to start work on the sequel next year." Devlin, Emmerich, and Creature Designer Patrick Tatopoulos are all planning to be involved with the sequel.

"By far, *GODZILLA* was the hardest film we'd ever done," Devlin recalled. "But I think we also learned an enormous

amount in the making of it that will make the sequel much easier to make. I think we've learned a lot about trying to make a movie to a date. I don't think we'll make that mistake again. The bottom line is, you've got to make the best movie you can. Then the chips will fall where they may."

And what of the next Devlin/Emmerich *GODZILLA* movie? "The only thing I will say, is that our intention always had been to follow in the footsteps of the very original *Godzilla* series. In the first *Godzilla* movie—before they cut Raymond Burr into it—*Godzilla* starts off as this horrible monster. In the middle, you start to understand its motivations. In the end, it dies tragically. In the sequel, *Godzilla* started to change and become more like the *Godzilla* we know today. And we want to do the same thing in this *Godzilla*."

While waiting for *Godzilla*, Devlin and Emmerich will be supervising other genre films. "We'll be announcing soon that we're developing several science fiction projects. The one that is out there, is that we're doing a film with Will Smith at Universal Studios called *THE MARK*. The original idea was created by Rob Leifeld, and the script is being written by *X-FILES* writers James Wong and Glen Morgan."

**Chuck Wagner**

**Roland Emmerich (right) directs Jean Reno (left) and Matthew Broderick in *GODZILLA*, last year's biggest disappointment.**





#30

# JOSS WHEDON

*Taking television down dark and disturbing streets.*

**J**oss Whedon is the executive producer, head writer and creative force behind the TV series *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, which is based, not coincidentally, on the movie he wrote in 1992. The *wunderkind* also wrote *ALIEN: RESURRECTION*, and co-wrote blockbusters *TWISTER*, *SPEED*, *TOY STORY*, and *WATERWORLD*. In conversation, Whedon's deportment is as changeable as the direction of the tornadoes in *TWISTER*. He talks of himself and his work easily, naturally, then suddenly turns somber, even morose. Just when you are about to pat him on the back and say, "Pull yourself together, man," he chuckles softly and informs you that it was all a big put-on.

When Whedon was first told that he was #30 on *CFQ*'s list of the Most Important People in the Genre, he appeared to break into anguished sobs. "This can't be happening," he wailed. "I was #20 last time! I beat [William] Shatner. You hear me? I beat Shatner. I just can't understand what I've done wrong. I just have to beat Shatner, I tell you!" There was a pause while Whedon made a pretense of collecting himself. "I'm...I'm okay now. Actually," he said, perking up a little too quickly, "I didn't even know that *Cinefantastique* had a list like that, or if Shatner was even on it. Not that beating out Shatner is that important to me, anyway. I mean, the guy was in sci-fi years before I was. To be perfectly blunt, until the movie *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, I never wrote sci-fi or horror. I was a sitcom writer. I did some episodes for *ROSEANNE*, and then *PARENTHOOD*, where I also served as a producer.

"Alas, the horror/sci-fi bug has always been with me, although I'm really not a terribly original person. By that I mean that the writing I do has been inspired by other peoples' work. I love *THE NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* trilogy, and the *ALIEN* trilogy. (Yes, you heard that right, I said *ALIEN* *trilogy*. I wrote the fourth film in the



#30: He's written blockbuster feature films, but Joss Whedon truly carved out his own genre niche with TV's *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, with Sarah Gellar.

series, but I still consider the *ALIEN* movies a trilogy.) Getting back to basics, I loved the old '40s horror films, like *FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN*. What I wanted to do with the film *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* is give audiences a dose of that old-time chiller-diller horror, plus a large helping of humor. I felt with *BUFFY* that here is a genre that hasn't been serviced by the brightest people in the world, and it's my fave, and I love it, so it was a good place to make a mark. If I write an intelligent, funny movie for the mass market, people will hail it as a godsend, whereas if I write just an intelligent movie for the sensitive adult market, nobody will notice. I turned out to be right about that.

"Believe me when I say that not all my experiences with writing sci-fi have been that rewarding. I rewrote parts of, God help me, *WATERWORLD*. When I first heard about the film, I was like, 'Zat iss zo cool!' Dropping the Dr. Strangelove accent, he continued, "There was a wonderful idea there, but it was a really bad movie. The producers were kind of building their *WATERWORLD* on sand. I don't think they ever really had a script that fulfilled the promise of the premise. When I got the script

that I was to rewrite, for the last 40 pages or so, the Mariner [played by Kevin Costner] never touches water. I mean, the name of the film was *WATERWORLD*, and this guy had gills, and that's what made him cool, and he was not in the water at any point for the last third of the movie! And it was never even commented on. I thought, these guys are really just not caring, are they? I flew to Hawaii for what was supposed to be one week to punch up *WATERWORLD*, and I ended up spending seven weeks doing N-O-T-H-I-N-G. It was terrible. I was bored out of my mind.

"That, I'm afraid, is how I feel about the movie experience these days. I don't really have a lot of good things to say about films. Maybe that's why all my energies these days go into the TV *BUFFY* and its new spin-off, *ANGEL*. I'm really excited by that whole project, because over the three years that *BUFFY* has been on the air, a pretty complex and passionate relationship has evolved between Buffy [Sarah Michelle Gellar] and her vampire boyfriend, Angel [David Boreanaz]. We plan to expand upon Angel's intense feelings in the new series.

"When I say the love-hate-love-fear bond between these two young people has 'evolved' rather

than 'developed,' that's because it has happened pretty much on its own. It's hard to explain, but Buffy and Angel always seem to be in the perfect star-crossed place for the next thing we need from them emotionally. Now that couldn't be vaguer, but there it is. They just are guiding us where they need to be. *ANGEL* will be more serious than *BUFFY*, although if you notice, *BUFFY* has gotten much darker in tone as the show has progressed. That's sort of a hallmark with me. In *TOY STORY*, well, that was pretty much a fun movie, but even that one had its scary moments. And, of course, there was *SPEED*, which was an action film, but dealt with a pretty frightening foundation—an undetonated bomb. With *BUFFY* I always planned for it to go to some dark places, because the show was all about our own personal fears and our own personal problems. If they resonated, it was creepy, and if they didn't, it was just a gay romp, and I wasn't really interested in that any more. We managed to squeeze in some disturbing episodes in our first and second seasons. We've gradually sort of cut ourselves loose more and more, until we got into the really twisted shit. At the same time, I hope we've maintained the lightness, the fun, the integrity and the hope that the show has along with the dark, twisted insane sexuality that we can't seem to get away from. Even with some of the embryonic projects I'm working on, some sci-fi, and action-oriented stuff, everything is winding up on the gloomy, demented side.

"This happens because, generally speaking, my world is a dark one, a very dark one. I am one crabby guy, but I'm also afraid of a lot of things. I see the world as a scary, dark, mean, oppressive, miserable pointless, disgusting place."

He stopped and lowered his head. It appeared as if he were going to break out into more bogus sobs, but he looked up and laughed. "But I'm having a lot of fun being in this frightening world. What else can I do in a place like this but have fun?"

Mitch Persons



Gilliam helmed *FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS*, turning in an interesting film based on a difficult piece of material; however, the box office was weak, and it remains to be seen whether Gilliam will take the blame (it's hard to imagine anyone else making a blockbuster hit from the Hunter S. Thompson book).

## 44 TIM BURTON ↓

(Last year: 34)

He couldn't get *SUPERMAN REBORN* to fly, even with Nicholas Cage attached. But his visual stylings are still very much in demand in Hollywood when quirky material arises, so he managed to take up the directorial reins on *SLEEPY HOLLOW*, the horror movie adaptation of Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," scripted by *SEVEN*'s Andrew Kevin Walker.

## 45 JAN DEBONT ↓

(Last year: 33)

Following the flop of *SPEED 2*, a handful of proposed projects failed to get a green light, until the director signed on to remake Shirley Jackson's *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE* (previously filmed as *THE HAUNTING*). With Liam Neeson in the lead role and DreamWorks backing the project, this could be the success that reinvigorates DeBont's career.

## 46 NEIL JORDAN ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

An Oscar-winner for *THE CRYING GAME*, Jordan achieved his greatest box office success with *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*. He followed that up with a couple of marginal efforts (including *THE BUTCHER BOY*, which contains some borderland fantasy elements) that received mixed critical reception and failed to find big audiences. This year, he returned to the horror genre in full force with *IN DREAMS*, a psychic thriller for DreamWorks, starring Annette Bening.

## 47 ANDREW NICOLE ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

His directorial debut, *GATTACA*, failed to impress the press or find an audience, but his script for *THE TRUMAN SHOW*



#37: David Fincher hasn't directed since *THE GAME*, with Michael Douglas.

became one of the most lauded and successful films of 1998. This led to his setting up shop with a multi-picture deal at a major studio that will allow Nicole to see more of his imaginative fantasy concepts reach the screen.

## 48 ANDREW KEVIN WALKER ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

*SEVEN* established Walker as one of the most sought-after screenwriters in town. With *8MM* out earlier this year and *SLEEPY HOLLOW* in production, Walker continues to set the standard for contemporary horror. Still, he has yet to attain complete control over how his work is brought to the screen (witness director Joel Schumacher's tampering with *8MM*), but a couple more hits under his belt could change that.

## 49 DAVID KIRSHNER ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

Producer-writer Kirshner revived the *CHILD'S PLAY* franchise for one of its most successful outings with *BRIDE OF CHUCKY*. Whether this will lead to more imaginative genre outings or just more sequels, remains to be seen.

## 50 RONNIE YU ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

He directed one of the great fantasy films of the decade, the Hong Kong masterpiece *THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR*, but his American debut, *WARRIORS OF VIRTUE*, turned out to be a disappointment. Fortunately, Yu score a sophomore success with

*BRIDE OF CHUCKY* (the \$35-million U.S. gross turned a tidy profit on the film's tiny budget). That might not be enough to give him carte blanche anytime soon, but Hollywood will offer him more fanciful fantasies to direct.

## 51 JONATHAN DEMME ↑

(Last year: not ranked)

His directorial effort, *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, stands as horror's only Oscar winner for Best Picture. Since then, Demme has worked outside the genre, but he returned to helm Oprah Winfrey's would-be Oscar contender, *BELOVED*. The film failed to find favor with audiences or critics, but it did show Demme's continued strength at manipulating horror elements to maximum effect, even if the meandering screenplay left one wondering what these elements were doing in a post-slavery historical drama.

#53: Alex Proyas directed one of last year's best genre films, *DARK CITY*, but the poor box office reception may force him to compromise his vision in the future.



## 52 GUILLERMO DEL TORO ↓

(Last year: 40)

After his impressive Mexican import, *CRONOS*, Del Toro's U.S. debut, *MIMIC*, was a box office disappointment (under \$30-million). However, the talented writer-director remains a critical favorite, and he recently bonded with some other Mexican filmmakers to start up a production company, which should result in more of his thoughtful and stylish brand of genre filmmaking reaching the screen.

## 53 ALEX PROYAS ↓

(Last year: 35)

Coming off the success of *THE CROW*, Proyas managed to create one of the best genre films on view last year, *DARK CITY*—a critical favorite that somehow failed to find its audience. Don't expect Hollywood to indulge him again anytime soon, but he is still in demand as a director, attached to helm the planned remake of Hammer Films' *QUATERMAS AND THE PIT*.

## 54 PAUL ANDERSON ↓

(Last year: 39)

His directing debut, *MORTAL KOMBAT*, was a hit. His follow-up, *EVENT HORIZON*, was a disappointment. His third film, *SOLDIER*, was by far his best, but no one came to see it—thanks to an ad campaign that made it look like a direct-to-video action flick. A safe commercial project would be a good bet for his next film.



## 55 ROBERT TAPERT & SAM RAIMI

(Last year: 45)

This producer-director duo hasn't crafted a fantasy feature film since 1992's *ARMY OF DARKNESS*, but *HERCULES* and *XENA* continue as strong as ever on the airwaves, and Raimi even got his theatrical directorial career back on track with *A SIMPLE PLAN*, a non-genre item that earned considerable critical respect. Now if that only leads to more great horror films like *THE EVIL DEAD 2*...



Sam Raimi hasn't directed a horror film since *ARMY OF DARKNESS* (above), but his TV shows continue strong, and he earned critical kudos for *A SIMPLE PLAN*.

## 56 DAVID CRONENBERG

(Last year: 48)

*CRASH* baffled some and offended others, but it was one of the most remarkable films on view two years ago, and its worldwide box office was strong enough to keep Cronenberg on track as the reigning director of cerebral cult weirdness. Now, he has another film ready to go, *EXISTENZE*, a science-fiction effort starring Jennifer Jason Leigh.

## 57 DAVID LYNCH

(Last year: 49)

*LOST HIGHWAY* raced neck and neck with *CRASH* for the honor of being the best art house genre film of the year of 1997. Unfortunately, David Lynch's film failed to break out to reach a larger audience. Since then, despite a deal that supposedly gave him carte blanche (and final cut) to make any film he wanted, the strange surrealist has been inactive in film.

## 58 ROMAN POLANSKI

(Last year: not ranked)

Since his legal problems in the '70s, Polanski's films have maintained a low profile in the U.S., and his attempt at a doppelganger comedy fell apart when star John Travolta walked. However, he is back in form with *THE NINTH GATE*, a thriller about the search for a volume of Satanic import, starring Johnny Depp and Frank Langella.

## 59 JOHN CARPENTER

(Last year: not ranked)

*VAMPIRES* barely passed the \$20-million dollar mark in the U.S., but it was still profitable, thanks to a low-budget and solid overseas business. Carpenter may not be helming any big-budget studio films in the near future, but this small success should maintain him at a level where he can continue to work on modestly-budgeted independent fare.

## 60 FRANK DARABONT

(Last year: not ranked)

His previous genre efforts (e.g., scripting *MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN*) have met with middling success, but he earned critical respect for adapting and helming *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*. Now, he's back with another Stephen King adaptation, *THE GREEN MILE*, which is expected to be a summer blockbuster, thanks to the casting of Tom Hanks in the lead role.

## 61 WALTER HILL

(Last year: not ranked)

His directing career has fizzled since his exciting action films in the '70s and '80s, but as an exec producer he has displayed a continuing interest in the genre with *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* and the *ALIEN* films. At last, he has directed a science-fiction feature film, *SUPERNOVA*, for MGM; now maybe he'll helm an *ALIEN* sequel?

## 62 RON UNDERWOOD

(Last year: not ranked)

This director has a reputation in Hollywood for handling special effects without losing the heart of the story—qualities on display in the remake of *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*. Although the film did not do the business one might have expected (it lacked the mindless but spectacular destruction that helped compensate for *GODZILLA*'s soggy storyline), it did earn good critical notices, and Underwood will remain in demand as a director of fantasy films.

## 63 ROBERT RODRIGUEZ

(Last year: not ranked)

*FROM DUSK TILL DAWN* was hardly a big hit, yet it spawned a DTV franchise, with Rodriguez overseeing one of the prequels in an executive producer capacity. After missing out on *ZORO*, he helmed *THE FACULTY*, from a script by Kevin Williamson—a amusing but uneven film that failed in its obvious attempt to match the success of the *SCREAM* franchise; nevertheless, it outsold *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN* at the box office and showed that Rodriguez can turn a profit helming modestly-budgeted genre material.

## 64 PETER HYAMS

(Last year: not ranked)

Back in the '70s and '80s, this director-cinematographer wrote his own material (for example, *OUTLAND*). More recently, he has worked as director-for hire on films like *THE RELIC*, which was far less than a blockbuster. Still, he has important friends in the industry, and he's trusted as a solid craftsman who can handle effects, stunts, and action—and still turn a film in on budget. Thus, he found himself entrusted with the job of directing Arnold Schwarzenegger in *END OF DAYS*, the \$100-million apocalyptic effort about the Devils return to Earth. Not bad for a director whose last film barely passed the \$20-million mark.

## 65 NICK PARK & PETER LORD

(Last year: not ranked)

Park has already won three Oscars for stop-motion short subjects, and Lord has been nominated twice in the same category. Now, they have teamed up to co-direct Aardman Animations' first feature length film, *CHICKEN RUN*. They'll be playing with the big boys for the first time in the feature-length arena, but they received an incredible boost when Mel Gibson agreed to voice the lead character and DreamWorks signed on to distribute the film domestically. With that kind of clout behind them, *CHICKEN RUN* has a shot at surpassing *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS* to become the most successful stop-motion film of all time.

#63: Robert Rodriguez' genre debut, *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN* (with Quentin Tarantino) was no blockbuster, but it spawned a direct-to-video franchise.





# VINCENZO NATALE

*Although overlooked and underrated, a stunning debut film promises great things to come.*

**H**ow does a struggling, young would-be genre filmmaker make a name for himself today, when independent filmmaking is almost exclusively the province of highbrow pretensions and low-budget genre films are mostly relegated to video obscurity? Well, if you're Canadian, you still have a shot at government subsidies and theatrical distribution, and if you're lucky, perhaps some U.S. distributor might even pick up your film. For Canadian Vincenzo Natale, director and co-writer of last year's *CUBE*, the question was how to marshal meager resources into a film that would make a profound impression on audiences accustomed to big screen extravaganzas.

"The basic premise came from a very pragmatic need—how to make a feature film in one location—but I knew I wasn't up to the task of doing *MY DINNER WITH ANDRE*," he said. "I wanted to do something visceral and kinetic, so it occurred to me: what if one room substituted for many? That made me think of a maze of identical rooms. Then all of a sudden it became a very interesting idea because I thought of a mathematical maze where everything is symmetrical. That was really the genesis: the idea came to me all at once. It's just one of those nice little epiphanies, which I guess you only have a few times in your life."

Natale wrote a draft, but it was quite different from what he ended up shooting. "Andre [Bijelic] was the first to read it and tell me it had some problems. So I said, 'Okay, smart guy, what would you do?' He said, 'Well, I'd simplify it. Take out anything extraneous.' Because the real power of the idea, he thought—quite rightly so—was that this is a group of people who come into this place with nothing save their physical prowess and their wits, and the fact that they're in a mathematical puzzle means they don't need any tools—they



Director Vincenzo Natale's feature film debut, *CUBE*, even earned high praise from fellow Canadian David Cronenberg.

don't need anything but their minds to escape."

Natale and Bijelic rewrote the screenplay in 1994. "I quickly realized that this idea I thought could be inexpensive—might be something I could do with my own money—was way beyond my means," said Natale. "So I took it to some production companies in Toronto. There was actually interest, but inevitably the less commercial aspects of the story would inhibit people from investing in it, and Andre and I were only willing to compromise to a point. In fact, we were willing to compromise—to do just about anything to get it made, but there was always a line we wouldn't cross, and invariably we were pushed beyond that line. So it went on the shelf until I had the good fortune to be accepted to the Canadian Film Center as a director-resident."

While at the center, Natale was a part of the screenwriting workshop. "I ran *CUBE* through that,

and did a couple rewrites, and submitted it to the Feature Film Project, which is the arm of the Canadian Film Center that does features. They rejected it. I made a short film called *ELEVATED*, which had some similarities. They quite liked the short, so when they actually saw something, they were able to make the leap and go ahead."

Though the film was designed to be logistically easy, Natale admitted that "the sick irony was that it had its own set of difficulties—chiefly that we were a group of 30 people in a fourteen by fourteen foot cube making a film about five people trapped in a fourteen by fourteen foot cube! It was actually physically quite a difficult film to do. The first lesson any cinematographer will learn is never shoot in a box! It's the most difficult thing to light. Derick Rodgers, who shot *CUBE*, really did a superb job, but it was very challenging."

Still, the realization of Natale's mathematical premise was impres-

sive—sort of a companion piece to Darren Aronofsky's *PI*. "We were both at Sundance," Natale recalled, adding that Aronofsky "is a really nice guy. We immediately bonded because we were the sci-fi math movies. I think he's a really talented director. I guess it's that whole Jungian thing—synchronicity—but it's not really a trend until there's three of them." (*SPHERE* doesn't count, because the similarity is only in title, not concept.)

Although *CUBE* failed to capture the art house audience that embraced *PI* (thanks to dismal distribution by Trimark in the U.S.), Natale remains optimistic about filmmaking in his native country. "I think you're going to see a lot of interesting genre stuff coming from Canada, because there's a little bit of a tradition following Mr. Cronenberg's work, and there's also willingness to do something that's outside of the mainstream."

Steve Biodrowski



#37

# JOEL SILVER

*The action-packed producer also knows how to scare up a good genre film.*

**J**oel Silver has long been one of Hollywood's premiere action producers, with credits for *PREDATOR*, *DIE HARD*, and *LETHAL WEAPON*. He has also long shown an affinity for horror, science fiction, and fantasy, from early credits like *XANADU*, *JEKYLL & HYDE... TOGETHER AGAIN*, and *WEIRD SCIENCE*, to his most recent, the science-fiction epic *THE MATRIX*.

One of Silver's biggest successes has been the *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* television series. Silver purchased the TV rights from comics publisher William Gaines and brought in his friends Richard Donner, Robert Zemeckis, and Walter Hill. "We put the show together for HBO in '89, and it was very successful, and we continue on," said Silver. "Bob [Zemeckis] and I are putting together a new little company [Dark Castle], and we're going to make a picture for Warner Bros, called *THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL*."

As a favor to Zemeckis, Silver appeared as Raoul J. Raoul in *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT*. Recalling the experience, he said, "I loved it. I did it for my friend Bob. That's the only time I'll ever act. I'll never act again. That was my one and only experience in the acting world."

Silver directed the "Split Personality" episode of *TALES* starring Joe Pesci as a con man who pretends to be his own twin brother in order to marry twin wealthy sisters. He said, "That was a really great episode that we did. I just wanted to see what it was like once, so I did it." He was also an executive producer for the *TALES FROM THE CRYPT* films *DEMON KNIGHT* and *BORDELLO OF BLOOD*.

However, the horror movie of which he is probably proudest is *PREDATOR*. "I think *PREDATOR* is one of the great monster movies of our time," he said. "There are a



Although most well-known for action efforts like *DIE HARD*, Joel Silver has also produced science-fiction films like *DEMOLITION MAN*, with Wesley Snipes.

few out there that I think I am proud of, and that's one of them. The script was sitting at Fox, and we tried to see if we could make it with Arnold Schwarzenegger. I liked John [McTiernan]; I tried to get him to do *COMMANDO* with me a year earlier, it didn't work, so I came back to him on that, and he was a good choice for that picture."

Two items that didn't work out were a planned film adaptation of Alan Moore's graphic novel *The Watchmen*, and the failed pilot *W.E.I.R.D. WORLD*. Regarding the latter, Silver said, "Some of it we just threw together because Fox wanted a show. The idea was to try to do something like *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*, but there was so much network interference that I don't even remember what it came out like. I don't think I ever saw the finished one."

For *THE MATRIX*, Silver responded to the Wachowskys' script and set about getting the film produced. Having enjoyed a long-standing relationship with Warners, he was able to put together funding. He said, "I just loved what it was about. I loved the whole essence of it. I loved the sto-

ry, and they immediately were showing me ideas for their visuals, and they were so startling. I helped them get it made. It's their vision; it's their creation. They always saw what they wanted, and I helped them make that happen. It's really their picture."

The Wachowskys earn high praise from Silver as filmmakers. "They are very visual," he said. "They know exactly what they want, which is an example of a really good director. They are not reticent about making it clear how they want things to look and sound and feel. They have the whole movie in their head when they are making it. They are dubbing the picture as they are shooting it. They know where the sounds are going to go and how they are going to go. They are extremely capable and talented about getting on film what they see in their heads."

Silver said the results have been impressive. "There are ideas the boys had that we've been able to create in the picture which haven't been done before, which no one has ever seen before—it's pretty spectacular."

Dennis Fischer

## 66 LARS VON TRIER

(Last year: not ranked)

The artsy *BREAKING THE WAVES* became a crossover hit two years ago, earning an Oscar nom for actress Emily Watson. Then Trier's miniseries sequel *THE KINGDOM 2* found its way to art house theatres in this country, edited together into a four-hour-plus running time. Although his visibility remains relatively low in the U.S., the Dutch director has no trouble getting financing overseas to get his quirky fantasies made.

## 67 PEN DENSHAM JOHN WATSON & RICHARD LEWIS

(Last year: 46)

Although they have not recently re-entered the theatrical arena, this trio of producers continues strong on the small screen, thanks to the success of *THE OUTER LIMITS*, which has spawned a host of other series and given Densham the clout to direct a TV-movie of *HOUDINI*.

## 68 BRANNON BRAGA & RON MOORE

(Last year: 44)

After scripting the first two *STAR TREK* films to feature the *NEXT GENERATION* cast, Moore and Braga were replaced by Michael Piller for *STAR TREK: INSURRECTION*. With *DEEP SPACE NINE* winding up its run on the small screen, we'll have to wait and see what kind of life beyond *STAR TREK* there is for this talented team.

## 69 HAYAO MIYAZAKI

(Last year: not ranked)

He's been making great anime in Japan for over a decade—sophisticated work that puts to shame recent Hollywood attempts at adult-oriented animation (e.g., the ponderous *PRINCE OF EGYPT*). Now, thanks to a deal with Disney, his stuff is finally on video shelves in dubbed versions that reach a far wider audience than the cult anime fanatics to whom he is an idol. Also, Disney's partner, Miramax, is releasing Miyazaki's masterpiece, *PRINCESS MONONOKE*, to theatres, with the voices of Gillian Anderson and Claire Danes. The result could open up American eyes to what animation is truly capable of.



## RISING STARS

Several promising newcomers emerged last year; plus, some more established talent tried their hands at the genre. Here's a rundown of people whose work shows they are capable of making the list next year.

### DARREN ARONOFSKY

PI was an auspicious art house debut that failed to cross over to mainstream acceptance but nevertheless earned critical respect. On the basis of that, Aronofsky now has a handful of potential science-fiction films in development, including an ambitious underwater epic set up at Dimension.

### MICHAEL BAY

An action specialist with BAD BOYS and THE ROCK to his credit, Bay scored big with his first science-fiction effort, ARMAGEDDON—which ended up being last year's big winner at the box office, easily surpassing the more highly hyped GODZILLA. It remains to be seen whether Bay will return to science-fiction and whether he will start to develop projects of his own without the help of mentor-producer Jerry Bruckheimer.

### BILL CONDON

He showed some promise with SISTER, SISTER and CANDYMAN: FAREWELL TO THE FLESH, but neither of those films prepared audiences for the greatness he achieved with GODS AND MONSTERS. Although the film reached only a small audience, it made numerous year-end Top Ten lists. With any luck, this will enable Condon to go on writing and directing personal films; let's just hope he doesn't abandon the genre entirely.

### VINCENZO NATALE

Like Darren Aronofsky, this writer-director scored an amazing debut last year with a mathematically-themed piece of science fiction, CUBE. Unfortunately, the theatrical release was ineptly bungled by distributor Trimark, so Natale wasn't catapulted to the level of cult stardom that he deserved. Nevertheless, the obvious skill on display in the film itself should be enough to help Natale launch an impressive career.



### 70 DARIO ARGENTO

(Last year: not ranked)

Although it played only a few dates in the U.S., THE STENDHAL SYNDROME became a major hit in Argento's native Italy, his first in over a decade. That led him to produce WAX MASK, an update of the old HOUSE OF WAX clichés, the success of which led to Argento's biggest and most lavish directorial effort to date, a full-blown remake of PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, co-written with Gerard Bach (THE TENANT) and starring Julian Sands (ROOM WITH A VIEW). Somehow, Argento has failed to make it big in America, but that hasn't stopped him from generating his won projects and continuing to make the kind of films he wants.

### 71 DAVID KOEPP

(Last year: 29)

He's had a hand in scripting several genuine blockbusters (JURASSIC PARK, THE LOST WORLD, MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE); however, when writing an original script, rather than adapting someone else's material, he sometimes comes up short, as with last year's SNAKE EYES. No word yet on whether he will be involved with JURASSIC PARK 3, currently being developed by Steven Spielberg and Michael Crichton, but no doubt Koepp will continue to be in demand as a screenwriter.

### 72 CLIVE BARKER

(Last year: not ranked)

The "future of horror" found a new role as patron to an ambitious art house production. His name and contacts helped writer-director Bill Condon finance GODS AND MONSTERS, a fictionalized take on the final days of FRANKENSTEIN—director James Whale. The risk paid off with critical kudos and a series of nominations. Though far from a blockbuster, the boutique film earned Barker the kind of respect you just don't get for HELLRAISER and the like.

### 73 STEPHEN KING

(Last year: not ranked)

1997 passed without a single King adaptation on the big screen. As if to make up for that, 1998 started with the inauspicious platform release of NIGHTFLYER, which had previously debuted on HBO. The film immediately disappeared from theatres on its way to video shelves. Then APT PUPIL, director Bryan Singers critically praised adaptation of King's novella, couldn't even earn a miserable \$10-million in the U.S. Fortunately for King, his name still can attract TV viewers, resulting in yet another mini-series—this time not an adaptation of one of his novel's but an original written especially for television, STORM OF THE CENTURY.

### 74 CHARLES BAND

(Last year: not ranked)

He was the one-time King of Direct-to-Video Horror, thanks to a distribution deal with heavyweight studio Paramount. But then the bottom dropped out of the DTV horror market, and Paramount terminated the relationship, amidst stories of fiscal improprieties. However, with more lives than a cat, Band rebounded from the fiasco, and now he is once again churning out his schlocky brand clichéd horror, including a planned series to cash-in on the famous names of movie monsters with titles like DRACULA REBORN, FRANKENSTEIN REBORN, THE WOLFMAN REBORN, etc., etc., ad nauseam.

### 75 STUART GORDON

(Last year: 43)

Despite some favorable reviews, Gordon's independently financed SPACE TRUCKERS failed to find a domestic distributor and instead ended up debuting on HBO before going to video. The one-time reanimator of the horror genre thus found himself working in the DTV arena, directing an adaptation (scripted by the author himself) of Ray Bradbury's story THE WONDERFUL ICE-CREAM SUIT—a well-received piece of work but not the kind of thing that has Hollywood lining up to finance your next dream project.

Debut director Darren Aronofsky (2nd from right) directs Sean Gullette (left) in the ambitious art house effort, PI.



## MARK OSBORNE

After years working on commercials and videos (including Weird Al Yankovic's JURASSIC PARK parody), this writer-director crafted one of the finest stop-motion short subjects ever seen, MORE. Only six minutes long, it's nonetheless more entertaining and profound than the vast majority of feature films release last year, showing that Osborne has the potential to do great things with the stop-motion medium.

## STEPHEN SOMMERS

His genre debut, DEEP RISING, was amusing, but the box office was weak. Nevertheless, Universal entrusted this writer-director with their long-underwraps remake of THE MUMMY, a project which had gone through the hands of such diverse talents as George Romero and Clive Barker. Whether Sommers can turn the property into a viable franchise for modern audiences remains to be seen.

## DAVID TWOHY

After scripting some big-budget Hollywood flicks (like WATERWORLD), Twohy opted for a career as a writer-director. His debut, THE ARRIVAL, was blown off screens by INDEPENDENCE DAY, but it did manage to spawn a direct-to-video sequel, and Twohy continued working as a writer-director, although now on DTV features.

## BACK FROM THE DEAD

Some of our favorite genre talents haven't been heard from in a while, due to films that failed to live up to box office expectations. Here is an alphabetical listing of those who have projects in development that should return them to their former glory.

## PETER JACKSON

Since THE FRIGHTENERS bombed, Universal ditched Jackson's remake of KING KONG; meanwhile, the director ditched Hollywood, and his mockumentary, FORGOTTEN SILVER, proved he still has the talent to make quirky, low-budget efforts in his native New Zealand. Now, the long-discussed live-action THE LORD OF THE RINGS is back in development, with Jackson set to direct the multi-million-dollar epic.



After the financial flop of THE POSTMAN, don't expect star Kevin Costner to be directing any more post-apocalyptic fantasies any time soon.

## HENRY SELICK

Despite obvious commercial calculation to reach a wider audience, JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH fell short of THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS at the box office. Shortly thereafter, Selick's multi-pic deal at Miramax fell apart, and the talented stop-motion director seemed like an artist without a patron. Luckily, Chris Columbus put in a good word at Fox, and Selick is now developing DARKTOWN, a new film that will combine live-action and stop-motion to surreal effect.

## IN LIMBO

Here are all the people whose talent would place them on the List if they worked more often in the genre. Either other interests have kept them away, or their last films didn't make \$100-million, or they just refuse to play the Hollywood game.

## WOODY ALLEN

A comedian, he often uses cinematic trickery and surrealism, but his latest film, CELEBRITY lacked the kind of fantasy element on view in films like ALICE and THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO.

## KEVIN COSTNER

Despite the total financial failure of THE POSTMAN, Costner remains not only a bankable star but a bankable director, thanks to financial confidence from distributors around the world who expect him to make a comeback with whatever his next film turns out to be. Still, it's difficult to imagine that he will be returning to the post-apocalyptic arena anytime soon.

## BRIAN DEPALMA

He squandered the clout he earned with the success of MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE, directing SNAKE EYES, which wowed neither audiences nor critics. Don't expect Hollywood to let him generate another project anytime soon; most likely, his next film will be a work for hire.

## H.R. GIGER

He wisely took his name off the atrocious SPECIES 2. Since then, Hollywood hasn't come calling, and even SUPERNOVA, which was originally conceived as a showcase for his designs, went into production without any input from the Swiss surrealist, famed for his contribution to ALIEN. Let's hope he gets his pet film project, THE MYSTERY OF SAN GOTARDO, off the ground.

## JEAN-PIERRE JENEUT

ALIEN: RESURRECTION was impressive visually, but it didn't do the kind of box office needed to revive the franchise, and it seems unlikely that Hollywood will entrust such a big budget to this talent French stylist anytime soon. Perhaps a retreat to European art house hits like DELICATESSEN and CITY OF LOST CHILDREN is in order.

## STANLEY KUBRICK

This living legend is still one of the four most powerful filmmakers in the world (along with Spielberg, Cameron, and Lucas), despite the decade-long gap since his last film. Guess we have to wait for him to revive his A.I. project, which went on the back burner while he directed EYES WIDE SHUT.

## FRANK MANCUSO

The abysmal SPECIES 2 brought an immediate end to the franchise; both critics and audiences hated it.

## DAVID WEBB PEOPLES

His script for SOLDIER resulted in the most underrated science-fiction film to emerge last year. Unfortunately, the weak box office (under \$20-million) makes it unlikely that Hollywood will be quick to green light his next pic.

## CHARLES EDWARD POGUE

Inactive since KULL THE CONQUEROR, this screenwriter has given interviews indicating how much better the film might have been if shot as written. Pogue needs one of his scripts to reach the screen unscathed so that viewers can decide for themselves. Then maybe Hollywood will sit up and take notice.

## RIDLEY SCOTT

He couldn't get a green light for I AM LEGEND, but he remains in demand around the world. Let's hope he gets another chance to dazzle us as he did with ALIEN and BLADE RUNNER.

## TOM SHADYAC

After THE NUTTY PROFESSOR and LIAR, LIAR, director Shadyac opted out of fantasy-comedy in favor of schmaltz-comedy with the manipulative PATCH ADAMS.

## J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI

With BABYLON 5 having completed its run, Straczynski will have to build up a new cult following with his follow-up series.

## SIGOURNEY WEAVER

After the lackluster box office of the last two ALIEN sequels, this talented actress's connection with the genre may be terminated.

## JERRY WEINTRAUB

With back-to-back box office bombs (THE AVENGERS and SOLDIER), this veteran producer is not likely to be handling many big-budget fantasy films in the near future, but he's been around too long for a setback like this to curtail his career permanently. □



#40

# DAVID KOEPP

*Writing blockbusters worth a billion dollars.*

If the screenplay is the blueprint of a movie, then David Koepp is one of the most successful architects of our time. Since his first screen credit, 1989's *APARTMENT ZERO*, he has had his name on some of the biggest hits in recent years, such as *JURASSIC PARK*, *THE LOST WORLD*, and *MISSION IMPOSSIBLE*. He has become a favorite screenwriter for Steven Spielberg, Brian DePalma and Robert Zemeckis (*DEATH BECOMES HER*). He hasn't even been limited by the fantasy genre. He has also worked on non-genre fare such as *BAD INFLUENCE*, *THE PAPER* and others. However, it is his genre work that has brought him the most success.

Koepp has pretty much split his output evenly between his own scripts and adaptations of other peoples work. With adaptations, he has a couple of rules. "I usually don't talk to the authors. Only in one case, on *CARLITO'S WAY* [1993]. I talked to the author, Edwin Torres, a lot because it seemed very autobiographical for him and the area where he grew up; besides, Spanish Harlem in the 1970s is something that was way out of my depth. It's tough for one writer to have another writer screwing around with his work. It's kind of best that you stay on opposite sides of the dance floor. The process is always the same. I read the books two or three times and highlight the stuff that I love and see if I'm highlighting the same stuff every time. Then I scene-card every thing in the book and start throwing out everything that I know won't fit. When I feel I have the bare bones version, I come up with those few transition scenes that I might need to make a script and then I start writing.

"Books and movies, no matter what people say, are completely different media. The methods of storytelling are so completely different. Novels are about what people think and feel, and movies are



Blockbuster screenwriter David Koepp's directing debut, *THE TRIGGER EFFECT*, fell short. But now he's back behind the camera with *A STIR OF ECHOES*.

about what they say and do."

Koepp has worked with some of the most visually oriented directors, like DePalma and Spielberg, and has come up with memorable sequences, such as the opening scene of *SNAKE EYES*. Since Koepp is also becoming a film director himself (he did 1995's interesting *THE TRIGGER EFFECT*), does that affect how much detail he puts into the scripts? "Not really. You write it the same way. I just know that if I'm writing it for myself to direct, it's going to be how I do it. When I'm working with a director like Spielberg or DePalma, a really heavyweight guy who has been doing it for a long time, they are going to impose their visual ideas on the script, which they should. When I do it myself, I stick a little closer to the initial visual ideas, which is not always good. A director has to reinterpret the writer's work, because that's what makes it come alive. If you shoot it exactly, it's usually dull."

What does Koepp consider to be his strong points as a screenwriter, considering that he is so successful at it? "I think I know how to construct a scene. I think a lot of the great stuff in movies happens in the transitions. William Goldman said in his book that screenplays are structure and that a

scene is important, but what is more important is how two scenes go together, because that is where the real energy comes from."

Currently, Koepp is finishing work on his second film as writer-director, an adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel *Stir of Echoes*, starring Kevin Bacon. However, he will not be involved in the upcoming sequels to *MISSION:IMPOSSIBLE* and *JURASSIC PARK*. "I'm not doing those because it takes a long time and I wanted to write and direct this (*ECHOES*). The bummer about directing is that it takes a year and a half, and if you write it, it's two. Also, I think, I'm 35, I want to see what else I can do. I know I can write those scripts because I already have."

And if the directing gig doesn't pan out, perhaps he can go back into acting. You see, he made a fleeting appearance in *THE LOST WORLD* being chased down the street and eaten by a grouchy dinosaur. "No, I think that's my one-and-only part. I figure, my character was eaten; he can never return in any other movie. I'm all for hiring skilled professionals to play the parts. It was fun. It took me two days to do it. Actually, every director should do it, because it gives you another perspective on actors. All I had to do was run

down the street and be eaten—maybe three shots. So I showed up on the first night. I saw my wardrobe and put it on, and I thought it made me look bad! So I went to the director and asked if I could wear my own clothes, and he said "Aargh, actors!" Then, the first night, I was there all night and they didn't get to me. I thought 'This is ridiculous.' Then, my time comes up; it's really tough. All this business about hitting marks and making sure not to do this and lowering your shoulder while opening the thing with your right hand? It's a real tough job and I don't know how actors keep all that shit straight."

As for the best and worst things about the fantasy genre that has brought him the most success over the years. "The good things and the bad things are visual effects. The great thing about visual effects is that it unfetters the imagination. The bad thing is that it restricts the imagination if mishandled. When digital effects first presented themselves, the first couple of years, you see this rush to use this new tool, but only in the sense of what it can do in the most basic ways. Can we make dinosaurs? Can we make tornadoes? Can we make volcanoes? That can be bad because, as has been pointed out ad nauseam, those effects seem to be separate from the story. That's okay at first, because it is entertaining to look at the effects.

"Now, however, what is really good I think, is that the euphoria of digital effects has died down. The question is, how can we use these effects in different kinds of stories to express different kinds of things. Like the clouds that Ang Lee put in *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*, the digital clouds he put in to enhance a period costume drama. I loved that. It's a great use of digital effects. They open up things, but they make it a little easy for us to fall back on them to bring all the entertainment value to the story."

Peter Sobczynski



## GENRE OSCAR PICKS

Welcome back to our annual attempt to acknowledge *cinéfantastique* worthy of Oscar consideration. Atypically, 1998 featured films like *THE TRUMAN SHOW* and *GODS AND MONSTERS* that earned the kind of critical respect that all but guarantees nominations from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. On the other hand, a number of other excellent genre films went ignored. As always, we are not predicting winners but recognizing efforts that deserve a nomination alongside the best of what mainstream cinema has to offer. Categories are omitted if there are no worthy contenders. Academy rules apply for qualification, except where noted.

### Picture

*SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* seems to be the front-runner in the category, but there were several genre films that equaled or surpassed it. *THE TRUMAN SHOW* is the most likely contender; less likely (in the eyes of voters) but still worthy were *GODS AND MONSTERS*, *DARK CITY*, and *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*.

### Director

Many of the best films last year were great collaborative efforts, making it difficult to pick an individual director deserving the lion's share of the credit. Vincent Ward, Peter Weir, and Bill Condon certainly marshalled the elements at their command to great effect in *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*, *THE TRUMAN SHOW*, and *GODS AND MONSTERS*, but *DARK CITY* comes closer to representing the singular vision of its director, Alex Proyas.

### Original Screenplay

In this particular category, Andrew Niccol's script for *THE TRUMAN SHOW*

**Gwyneth Paltrow gave last year's best performance by an actress in a genre film, in *SLIDING DOORS*.**



**MIGHTY JOE YOUNG** seamlessly combined CGI, full-scale mechanical, and man-in-a-suit effects to create a totally believable fantasy character.

*SHOW* was is one of the few fairly easy choices in a year filled with outstanding work. The concept is clever and well-executed: the idea arises organically out of the story; without every having to be overtly expressed in the dialogue, they come through clearly to the viewer.

### Adapted Screenplay

In *GODS AND MONSTERS*, Bill Condon captured the essence of Christopher Bram's excellent novel, *Father of Frankenstein*. Even acknowledging the fine source material, Bram still deserves credit for putting it into dramatic form, making the necessary adjustments without losing the soul of the piece, and creating a script that served as a basis not merely for a faithful adaptation but for a great film, period.

### Actor

The portrait of dying, gay filmmaker James Whale in *GODS AND MONSTERS* is the kind of role designed to be a *tour-de-force*, Oscar contender, and Ian McKellen played it for all it was worth: by turns witty and caustic, naughty and nice, flamboyant and self-centered, but always sympathetic and moving.

### Actress

Another obviously showy role was Gwyneth Paltrow's turn in *SLIDING DOORS*, playing two versions of the same character. An obvious stunt like this may sometimes overshadow fine work in a more subtle role, but in this case the execution lived up to the potential of the gimmick.

### Supporting Actor

French actor Jean Reno was one of the few good things in *GODZILLA*, and that's an achievement not to be underestimated: creating an engaging character in a film otherwise noteworthy for bad acting, bad writing and an almost complete absence of characterization.

### Supporting Actress

Annabella Sciorra movingly brought to life the agony of the grieving, mentally distraught widow in *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*. In a reactive role that could have descended into one-note bathos, she managed to be always sympathetic, never annoying pathetic. You believe Robin Williams' Chris would risk the dangers of Hell to rescue her.

### Foreign Film

As Japan's official foreign language submission, *PRINCESS MONONOKE* was really qualified to be considered last year, but I ignored it in favor of waiting for a domestic release that has yet to happen (and when it does, it won't be a foreign language film any more, having been dubbed into English). So I'm taking this opportunity to acknowledge the greatness of the Japanese-language version; hopefully, the English release will live up to the original.

### Art Direction

*WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* is an obvious winner here, creating a vision of the afterlife at once

familiar and original, beautiful and profoundly moving.

### Cinematography

Much of the imagery in *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* was established with CGI, but the overall painterly look was first established by the excellent cinematography, which set the style that the effects technicians then saw through to the final vision.

### Dramatic Score

*VAMPIRES* combined the usual John Carpenter synthesizer motifs with an excellent main theme based around a grungy three-chord guitar riff that perfectly captured not only the hot desert feel of the setting, but also the workmanlike professionalism of the ruthless vampire slayers led by James Woods.

### Musical Score

*MULAN* wasn't the best song score ever for a Disney animated film, but it far surpassed the work in *A BUG'S LIFE* and *PRINCE OF EGYPT*.

### Documentary

*FULL TILT BOOGIE* was far more than the usual puff-promo piece seen so often today. It was an amusing, behind-the-scenes look at independent filmmaking, and it turned out far more interesting than its subject, *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*.

### Short Subject

*MORE* is unarguably one of the great achievements ever in this category, a sophisticated six-minute piece of stop-motion that says so much without ever uttering an intelligible line of dialogue.

### Visual Effects

This is another obvious category for *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*, which made excellent use of CGI to create its painted-world vision of Heaven. But *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG* should not be overlooked—a film that brought an imaginary creature life with a believability that far exceeds *GODZILLA*. □

**Mark Osborne's *MORE* was the outstanding stop-motion short subject.**





## CINEMA

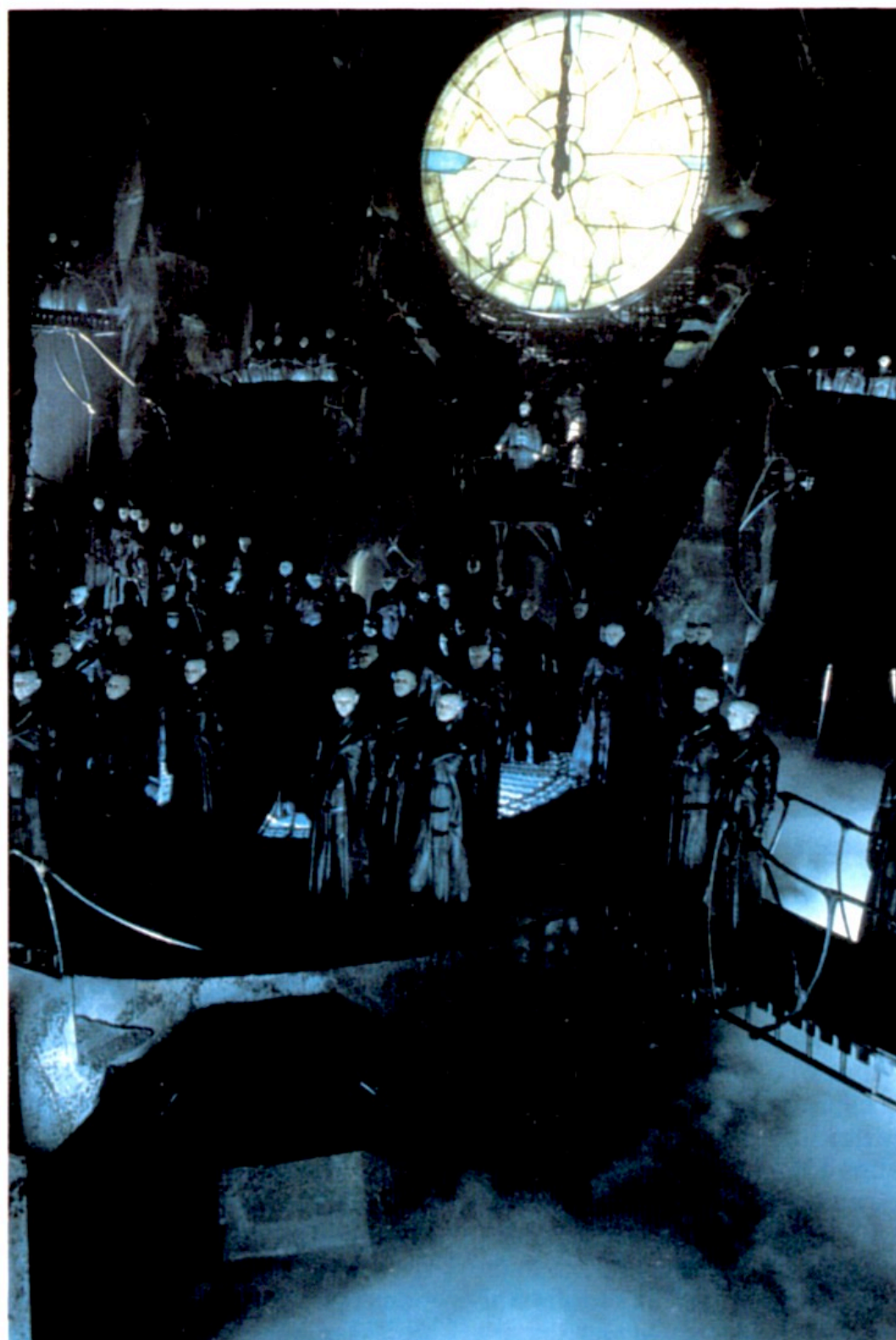
By Steve Biodrowski

## DARK DREAMS, GODS AND MONSTERS 1998 was the best year of the decade for genre films.

Whatever mainstream critics said, 1998 was a great year for *cinéfantastique*, the best of the decade; in fact, I can't remember the last time it was so easy (or hard to come up with a Top 10 list for the previous year's genre films. On one hand, it was easy, because there were a number of excellent choices, which saves me from having to resort to reissues, festival screenings, and the like to fill out the list. On the other hand, it was hard, because the surfeit of quality made it harder to squeeze all the worthy films on to the list, eliminating entertaining but slightly flawed films that once would have been easy winners despite their weaknesses.

### THE BEST

1. The year started off with an amazing entry that was praised and damned for all the wrong reasons. Alex Proyas's *DARK CITY* received the typical "great visuals, weak story" criticism that is attributed automatically to any visually stunning piece of science-fiction in the post-Ridley Scott era. What these critics missed is that the film has an ambitious story, structured as a mystery, that slowly peels back the layers of its enigma while pulling the audience into the plight of its lead character, an amnesiac man who gradually realizes that his entire world, including the memories of its inhabitants, is part of a horrible experiment perpetrated by a mysterious race of beings struggling to unravel the secret of individual identity. The concept is staggeringly ambitious without ever falling prey to pretentiousness, and the very idea is truly frightening if one stops to contemplate it: if all I am is a collection of memories, then what is left of me if my memories can be altered? When this film was originally reviewed, I gave it only three stars, because the density of storytelling, especially in the early reels, seemed more intellectually interesting than emotionally arresting; a second viewing, however, reveals the intricate storytelling of the opening third, which lays out the exposition in a series of scenes that cross cut between various characters whose purpose will gradually be more fully developed, like a finely structured overture.



*DARK CITY* wove science-fiction's post-*BLADE RUNNER* elements into an intriguing film that was far more than an empty visual exercise.

2. Probably most people's choice for the best genre film of the year would be *THE TRUMAN SHOW*, and deservedly so, because it is an excellent piece of work—clever, funny, entertaining on the most basic narrative level (we like the lead character and want to know what happens to him), while at the same time stirring up intriguing ideas about the nature of reality and identity (is who we are really a matter of what's inside us or of how we react to others because of the way they act toward us?). However, it is not quite the perfection that some would have us believe ("the best film of the decade"). The dramatic third act relies on simple "man versus nature" imagery, with Truman brav-

ing a storm (admittedly, a man-made one). The result is that, just at the point where the character is supposed to be taking the wheel of his own destiny, Jim Carrey's excellent performance takes a back seat to the physical effects team. This is only a minor quibble, however, and the film amply compensates by giving Carrey an excellent exit line.

3. *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* is one of the most glorious experiences ever committed to celluloid, a beautiful fantasy with imagery that is much more than eye deep. For some reason, the joy the film captured turned off most of the nation's critics, especially the fashionably cynical ones who think

that atrocious garbage like *VERY BAD THINGS* has something profound to say about human nature. (Well, I suppose it does, to wit: small-minded, miserable people don't like being reminded of the ecstasy missing from their own lives, but they do like to think that sordid misery is the sum total of the human condition, because then their own lot doesn't seem so bad in comparison.) Digression aside, the visual impact of this film comes not merely from art direction and CGI, but from a directorial style that uses the camera to reveal the characters even when they are trying to keep themselves hidden. (Watch the dialogue between Robin Williams and Annabella Sciorra in the mental institution, and note the anger that flashes across Williams' face—which his character cannot allow to be seen by his suicidal wife.) Like *THE EXORCIST* decades ago, this is a film that became the victim of its own effectiveness—a strong visual impact that blinded viewers to the layers of subtlety underneath. The ending is somewhat simplistic (another paean to family values), ignoring one of the points of Richard Matheson's source novel (that in the afterlife, thought is a stronger tie than blood relationships), but this is nowhere near enough to seriously damage a film with so many other strengths.

4. Of the top films, *GODS AND MONSTERS* is the one that presses closest to perfection. One would be hard put to find a misstep, wrong turn, or mistake in either the concept or the execution. In fact, if this were a "best of" list for all films released last year, I might put this one at the very top. However, we are dealing with science-fiction, fantasy, and horror: *GODS AND MONSTERS* plays off the imagery and significance of the latter genre (the films of James Whale in particular) and incorporates that imagery into its own storytelling in order to make profound points about the relationship between life and art; however, its real strength lies not in its genre elements but in the poignant drama of a dying man (Whale himself in a fictionalized but convincingly believable personae limned by Ian McKellen). If you are familiar





**THE TRUMAN SHOW** earned critical accolades not often visited on a piece of science-fiction filmmaking.

with Whale's work, especially his two **FRANKENSTEIN** films (and if you're reading this magazine, you certainly should be), it will add a layer of resonance to this film, but even if you aren't, you will find this one of the most entertaining and moving films of the year.

5. Talk about high concept. **CUBE** has one that can't be beat: a group of characters trapped inside an enigmatic, lethal cube who must band together to find a way out before they all die from dehydration

and starvation. The drama of character conflicts that ensues is good but not spectacular, but the suspense of the situation overwhelms any defects, and the mysterious nature of the prison leaves the proceedings open to metaphoric interpretations that elevate the film above the level simple of its deceptively simple narrative.

6. A sort of companion piece to the previous entry, **PI** is more ambitious in its ideas: whereas the title structure in **CUBE** is a sort of giant Rorschach inkblot, allowing

viewers to make interpretations that the film might or might not support, **PI** openly courts big themes: is all the world reducible to mathematical formulae? If so, is God then a giant mathematician in the sky, and can we unlock his secrets? Heady stuff, but without the built-in suspenseful hook of **CUBE**, the narrative wanders ever so slightly, relying on surreal dream scenes and paranoid encounters to fill out its running time—minor narrative imperfections that are overshadowed by the film's thematic ambitions.

7. This list wouldn't be complete without at least one dumb summer blockbuster, and this year's choice is **ARMAGEDDON**. Fortunately, the dumbness is limited to scientific inaccuracy that doesn't impact on the excitement and fun, plus a certain amount of overkill that makes one realize the film could have been even better had there been a few more modulations to a quieter tone. To be fair, there are more quiet moments than anyone gave credit for, and they're not just filler. In fact, the amazing thing is that, for all the high-tech effects, the characters never get lost in the chaos, and their fates provoke an emotional response equal to or greater than the catastrophic demolition of famous artifacts.

8. **SLIDING DOORS** is another ambitious entry, seeking to throw light on the importance of serendipity in the lives of people who leave themselves open to the whims of fate by avoiding the difficult decisions facing them. The result is a double, parallel narrative showing a character following two different narrative threads, depending on whether or not she managed to catch a subway train before the sliding doors of the title closed. The film is warm and engaging, fully involving us with the character in both time lines. Resolving this double life turns out to be a hurdle over which the story stumbles slightly, but that's a minor trip-up in a film that is otherwise consistently funny and romantic.

9. **ANTZ** failed to top Disney-Pixar's rival CG effort, **A BUG'S LIFE**, at the boxoffice, but it was still a great success, and it's the better movie. With lots of sophisticated humor and characterizations, it's barely a "cartoon" at all; far more than the heavy-handed **PRINCE OF EGYPT**, this succeeds at being an entertaining-for-adults film that just happened to be achieved with animation.

10. In a lesser year, John Carpenter's **VAMPIRES** could have filled this slot; it's entertaining despite non-sequitur dialogue like "He'll be unstoppable unless we stop him!" This year, however, it must make way for **SOLDIER**, a much more solid effort thanks to a superior script (from **UNFORGIVEN**'s David Webb Peoples) that distills similar mythic Western archetypes (in this case **SHANE**) and injects them into a futuristic, interplane-

**Kurt Russell** played an interplanetary variation of **Shane** in **SOLDIER**, an action-packed effort elevated above its genre elements by solid writing.



**Actor Ian McKellen** brought horror director **James Whale** to life in the wonderful **GODS AND MONSTERS**.





tary setting. The film deftly handles the mix of genre elements while charting the transformation of its taciturn title character from mindless soldier to heroic defender of the innocent. Kurt Russell plays this difficult role to great effect, engaging empathy without resorting into syrupy sentimentality.

## HONORABLE MENTION

In past years, I sometimes found it necessary to fill out the Top 10 with some classic films that had been reissued. I've foregone that route this year, in order to make room for some fine contemporary films, but on the other hand, the midnight-screening resurrection of Lucio Fulci's *THE BEYOND* practically qualifies as its initial release in this country, because when it originally appeared on these shores in the early '80s (shorn of footage, rescored, and re-edited), it was practically a different movie. Restored to all its gory glory, the film is no masterpiece by any conventional standards, but as a cult film it practically invents its own standards.

Although a vastly greater film, *THE WIZARD OF OZ* does not rank as high on my list of revivals. It was definitely a pleasure to see it up on the big screen for the first time in many years, but its "restoration" was less significant, because the film has never suffered indignities like colorization, matting to widescreen, or re-editing. Nevertheless, it was amazing to see the improvement afforded by a brand new, cleaned-up print.

Some other worthy films that might have made the list in weaker years: Disney's *MULAN* was an

The fictional bio-pic incorporated horror elements from Whales film *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*.



**WHAT DREAMS MAY COME** failed to impress critics, but the power of its imagery and imagination deserve respect.

improvement over *HERCULES*, but it didn't quite reach the heights of their best recent efforts; likewise, *A BUG'S LIFE* was good fun, but nowhere near as sophisticated as *ANTZ*. *LAWN DOGS* was a solid art house effort, but the genre element was too minimal to warrant inclusion in the Top 10; *EVER AFTER: A CINDERELLA STORY* was even better, but it had no genre elements at all, despite being derived from a well-known fairy tale. Finally, *STAR TREK: INSURRECTION* recaptured the idealism of the franchise, but the story was less exciting than that of *FIRST CONTACT*.

## ACADEMY OF THE OVERRATED

There were several prime choices for this category last year, which seeks to counteract the unaccountable critical fawning often visited on notably unworthy entries. *DEEP IMPACT* did not receive rave reviews across the boards, but any at all were more than it deserved. Sure, the film had many good things to recommend it, but the insistence on playing out a doomsday scenario like a soap opera diminished rather than deepened the impact of the approaching asteroid.

*BABE: PIG IN THE CITY* also had much to recommend it; unfor-

tunately, the many good moments are scattered throughout an ungodly mess that has little dramatic structure and that emphasizes its good elements and bad elements equally. Amazingly, this film received almost universal accolades. One can only assume that critics were having fond flashbacks to the magnificent original or that the highly stylized artificiality appealed to some deep-seated need to believe they were watching a high-class work of art.

But the real winner this year of the dubious distinction must go to

*PLEASANTVILLE*. Not only does the film squander an amusing idea with a heavy-handed treatment, it does so in a simple-minded way that is obvious, unconvincing, and ultimately offensive. Despite this, by attacking a safe, obvious target ('50s sitcom TV), the film managed to have its cake and eat it, too. The result was that weak-kneed liberals embraced the film as if it were some kind of biting, sophisticated satire, while none of their fundamental beliefs or values were ever in any way threatened. □

One of the most lauded genre films of the year, *PLEASANTVILLE*, with Jeff Daniels, was also one of the most overrated, a toothless satire.





## VIDEOFILE

By John Thonen

## TEMPORARY RESPITE FROM THE DTV DROUGHT 1998's releases actually deserve to be on a "Best of" list.

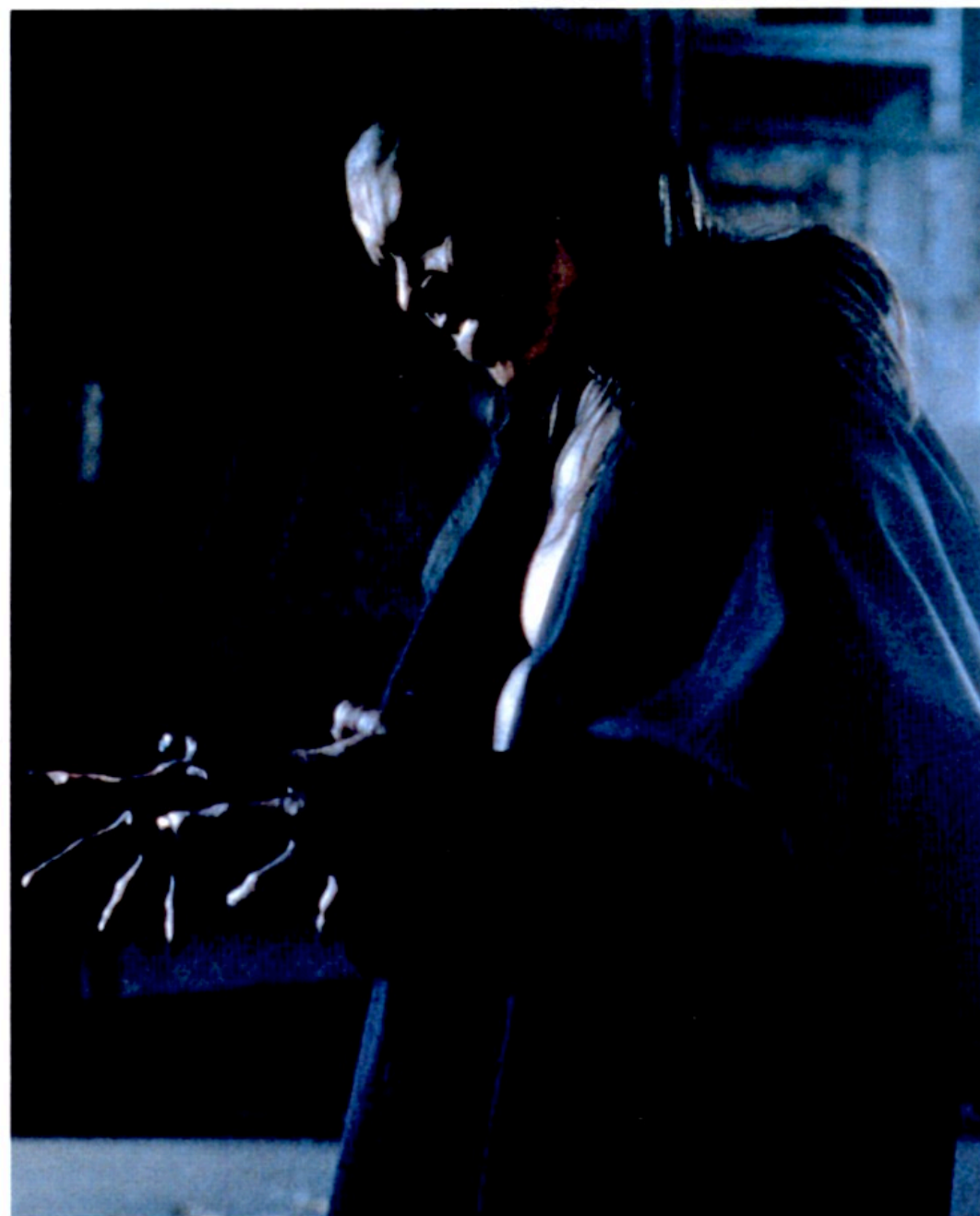
Six years ago, when I started this annual review of the year's Direct To Video (DTV) releases, I honestly felt that DTV would soon go the route of Made for TV and Made for Cable movies and develop into a respectable outlet for films. Instead, each year I found myself forced to bestow the "Best Of" moniker in some categories, to films more accurately labeled, "least bad." Happily, the caliber of 1998's releases brings a temporary respite from this kind of desperation. To celebrate, I'm foregoing my usual "Worst Of" listings to give more space to the victors, and to denote honorable mentions in several categories.

### BEST SCI-FI

Sci-Fi was by far the most active category, though most were simply well-worn action or horror premises enlivened by a few CGI effects. A notable exception, and well worthy of an honorable mention, was the Australian *RESISTANCE* from Leo Films. Co-directors Paul Elliot and Hugh Keyes Byrne (Toe-Cutter in *MAD MAX*) forego the effects to concentrate on the human aspect of an economically depressed near-future, where many live as nomadic camp-dwellers, oppressed by nationwide martial law. Told through the eyes of an ensemble of female protagonists, this is an emotionally wrenching and powerful tale.

Good as *RESISTANCE* was, the hands-down Sci-Fi winner is director Renee Daalder's *HABITAT*, from A-Pix Entertainment. The amazingly un-prolific Daalder, helming his second feature in 32 years, delivers an imagi-

Michael Rooker's priest tries to stop the *SHADOWBUILDER* from getting the life force of a 12-year-old boy.



The angel Gabriel's messenger of death appears in *PROPHECY 2*, the noteworthy DTV sequel to Gregory Widen's *THE PROPHECY* (1995).

native and well-executed tale of a near future where the ozone layer is gone, vegetation is dying and a few minutes in the sun can kill. Daalder's story is of a family whose patriarch is a scientist trying to save the planet through an accelerated evolution that hybridizes man and plant. Both father and mother (Alice Krige of *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT*) evolve into non-human forms, affording Krige yet another chance to be eerily erotic as a non-human character, but it is with their genetically altered teenage son that man's future lies. Daalder exhibits a remarkable understanding of his young protagonists who, despite the far-out situation, remain believable teens. Strong performances, excellent effects and a thoughtful concept make this a winner all the way.

### BEST HORROR

Only a few years ago, horror had become as much of a rarity on

video as it was in cinemas, but the genre has staged a strong comeback in both areas. Topping this category is Sterling Entertainment's *BRAM STOKER'S SHADOWBUILDER*, the directorial debut of CGI effects whiz Jamie Dixon. The track record for special effects gurus turned movie directors is not an encouraging one, which serves to make Dixon's film all the more impressive.

Ostensibly based on an obscure Bram Stoker short story, the film tells of the confrontation between renegade priest Jacob Vassey (Michael Rooker) and the title creature, one literally born and composed of darkness. The spoils of this war will be the pure soul of a 12-year-old boy. Empowered by the boy's life force, the *Shadowbuilder* will be able to turn back creation to the moment before God said, "Let there be light," thus wiping man forever from the Earth.

Director Dixon puts his characters before his visuals, allowing

Rooker to give his most magnetic performance since *HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER*. Despite his effects background, Dixon wisely puts his special effects in a secondary position, but delivers the goods whenever they do command the screen. Before the film is two-thirds over, you'll find yourself watching every patch of darkness on the screen, waiting for it to burst to life and engulf another hapless victim. You may even do the same with those dark corners in your own room.

### BEST SEQUEL

Sequels have long dominated the DTV market, but '98 saw many long-running series (that had long over-stayed their welcome) finally go by the wayside. Still, the sequel will certainly be back, most likely under the auspices of Dimension Video whose parent company now owns the franchise rights to *HALLOWEEN*, *HELLRAISER*, *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*, and *CHILDREN OF THE CORN*, among other likely DTV contenders.

1999 saw Dimension flex its considerable DTV sequel-muscle with *PROPHECY 2*. Writer-director Greg Widen's *THE PROPHECY* (1995) was one of the few noteworthy horror offerings from the otherwise bleak period the genre recently endured. Widen was uninvolved in this sequel, but director and co-writer Greg Spence treats his forerunner's concept, of humans caught between warring factions of angels, with imagination and respect. Spence may even have managed to broaden the appeal by dropping some of the more heavy-handed religious aspects in favor of a stronger dose of horror. The film is expertly cast, most notably in the returning presence of Christopher Walken as Gabriel, leader of the rebellious angelic faction that seeks to oust humans from God's favor. Russell Wong, Eric Roberts, and Brittany Murphy also stand out, but the biggest surprise is the captivating performance of Jennifer Beals (*FLASHDANCE*), who has previously given little indication that she was more than just a pretty face. Hopefully Walken and Dimension will see fit to bless us with yet another coming of angels.



## BEST CHARLES BAND/ROGER CORMAN

DTV impresarios Band and Corman had a lean year, releasing some of the worst efforts of their careers. Corman's recently sold New Horizon Video relied on the lowest denominator: breasts, blood, buns and precious little quality. Meanwhile, Charlie Band began showing signs of recovery from his nearly devastating financial problems. The success of the otherwise regrettable *CURSE OF THE PUPPETMASTER* and his new kid-vid line, *Pulsepounders*, has put Band solidly on the comeback trail. Sadly, his product still plumbs the depths of crudity, seldom rising above mediocrity. Which makes one grateful for the continuing presence of director Ted Nicolaou.

1998 saw multiple Nicolaou releases, including kid-vid efforts *THE SHRUNKEN CITY* and *SHADOW OF THE KNIGHT*, whose origins as a sequel to his wonderful *DRAGONWORLD* are inexplicably hidden. However, the best of his offerings for the year is *SUBSPECIES 4: BLOODSTORM*, which is also Band's best production for '98. *BLOODSTORM* is not up to Nicolaou's best work (*DRAGONWORLD*, *SUBSPECIES 2*), but the fact that Nicolaou continues to rise to the surface of an arena where so many others are satisfied to exist as bottom feeders, says much about his considerable talents.

*SUBSPECIES 4* is short on the action and effects that heightened early entries in the series, but in terms of mood and atmosphere, no one gets more mileage out of Full Moon's now familiar Rumanian locations, than does Nicolaou. The film is also bolstered by a trio of strong performances, from returning series stars Denice Duff and Anders Hove as well as newcomer Iona Abur. Nicolaou is richly deserving of moving on to greener (as in more money) pastures, but I for one welcome his continued DTV presence; without him, there would simply be nothing of note in the Band/Corman corner of the DTV universe.

## BEST OUTLAW FILM

Each year I feel compelled to explain this category, which covers the semi-pro efforts of backyard movie makers who churn out DTV genre efforts outfitted with little more than a camcorder. At first, the "best of" entries in this field were those movies that

continued on page 61

## LASERBLAST

By Dennis Fischer

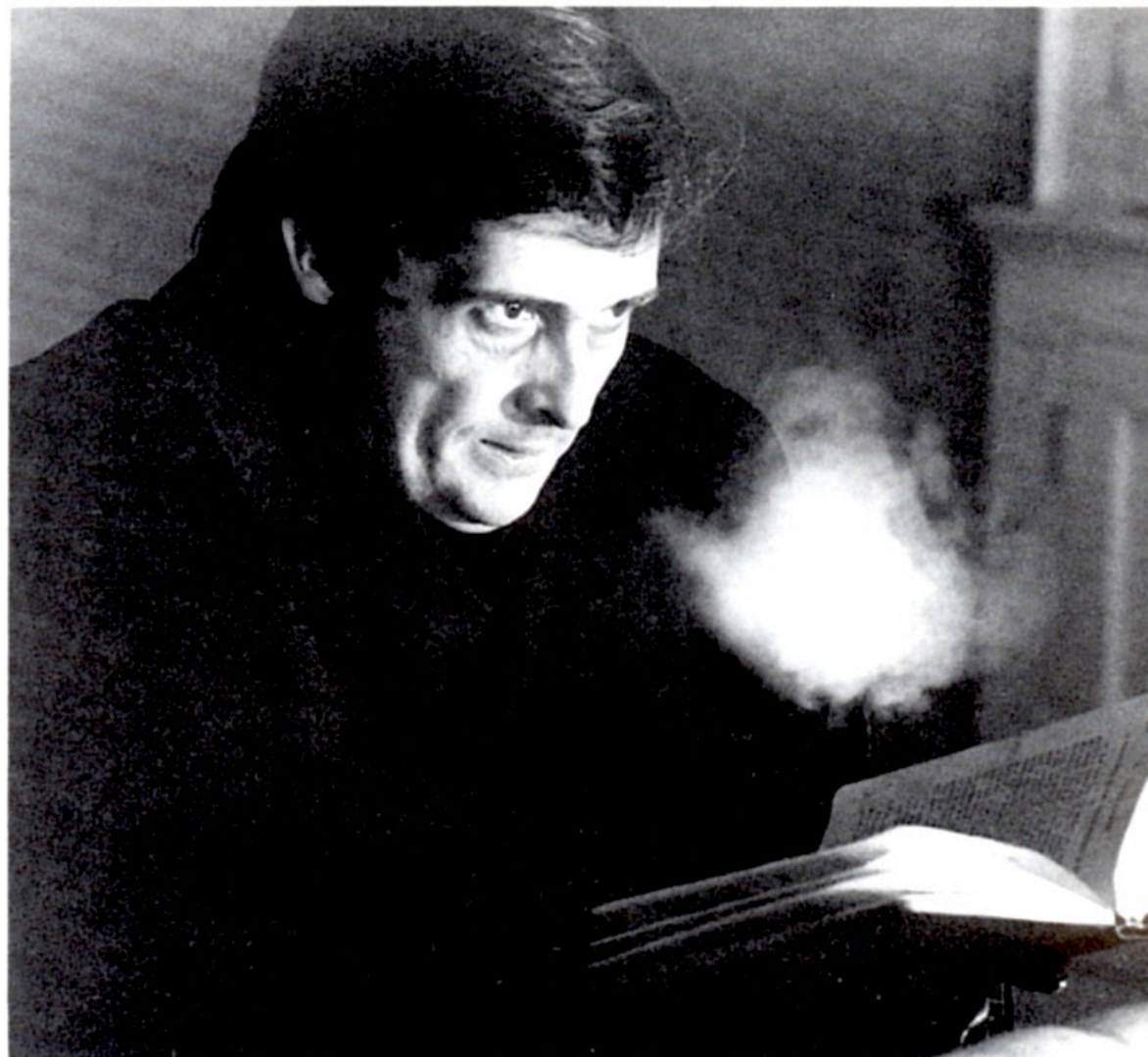
1998 was a terrific year for disc collectors; some of the greatest productions of the past have been lovingly restored and presented as laser and/or DVD special editions. One of the best of these packages was for Alfred Hitchcock's *PSYCHO* (Universal, laser and DVD), which restored the opening Paramount logo and presented the film in home video widescreen for the first time. (There is a slight cropping of the full frame image.) With Gus Van Sant's remake, Universal placed a moratorium on selling VHS copies, so *PSYCHO* is only available on DVD and laserdisc.

The disc includes an excellent "Making of *PSYCHO*" documentary, which is smartly chapter encoded and presents many of the surviving cast and crew members. There is a brief censored scene shown, though it's nothing significant. Other bonus materials include a good print of the film's amusing trailer (which misleadingly shows Vera Miles screaming in the shower), newsreel footage concerning the release, the shower scene with and without music, Saul Bass' storyboards for the shower sequence, production photographs and notes. This is a *PSYCHO* to go nuts for.

From the horror classic of the '60s to the horror classic of the '70s: Warner Brothers has done a superb job with *THE EXORCIST*, with the sound newly remixed for DVD. Additionally, the DVD presents the longest version of the excellent BBC documentary *THE FEAR OF GOD: THE MAKING*

## TRACKING THE BEST OF 1998

*A cornucopia of great disc releases.*



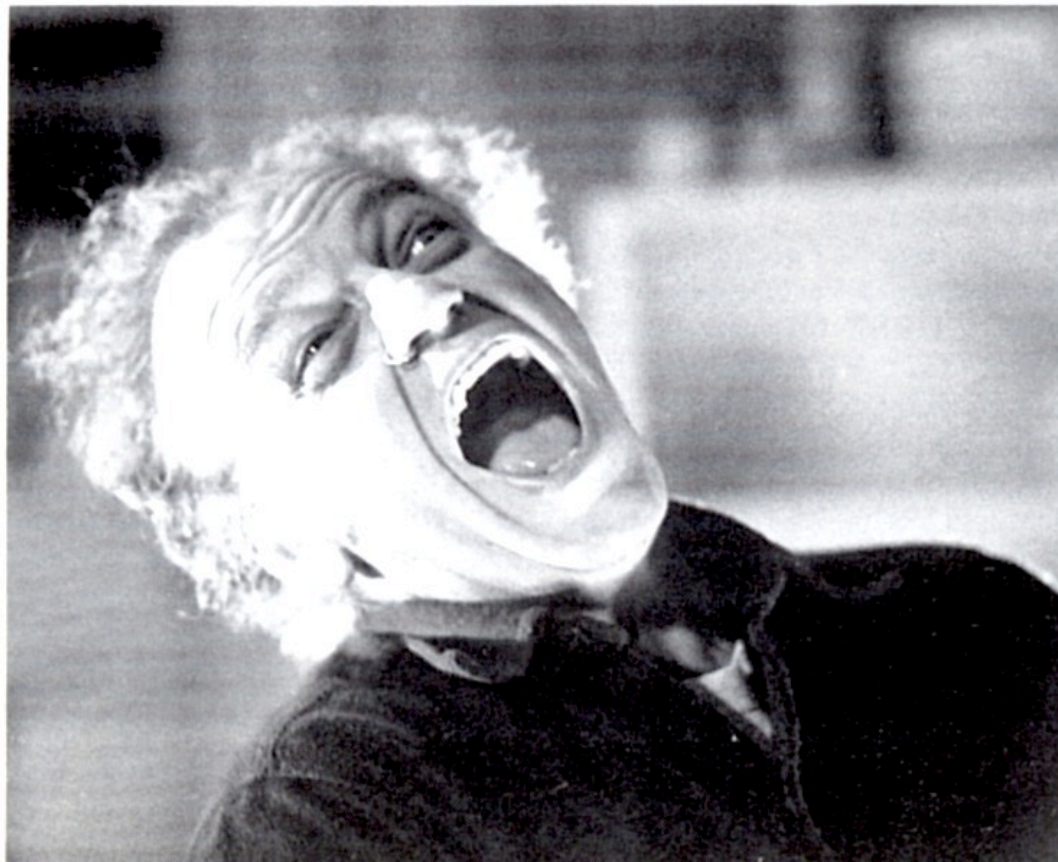
**THE EXORCIST** (with Jason Miller as Father Damien Karras) was released by Warner Brothers on DVD and LD in an excellent collector's edition.

*OF THE EXORCIST*, as well as two feature-length commentaries, one by director William Friedkin, who discusses the making of the film but not its effects, and one by author William Peter Blatty, ruminating on the philosophical implications of the story. (Blatty seems concerned that audiences might misinterpret the ending to mean that Evil, rather than Good, triumphs, while Friedkin prefers for

audience members to form their own interpretations.) The documentary presents Dick Smith's tests, behind-the-scenes anecdotes, and cut scenes, including the legendary but silly "spider down the stairs" sequence and the alternate ending (Blatty's borrowing from *CASABLANCA* to show that Lt. Kinderman forms a relationship with Father Dyer as he had with Father Karras, indicating that Karras lives on in a sense in Dyer). It's the best thing that's been done on *THE EXORCIST* since *Cinefantastique's* own cover story when the film was released.

John Carpenter's *THE THING* (Universal) still holds up as one of the ultimate monster movies, and the laser and DVD Special Editions feature running commentary from Carpenter and star Kurt Russell, an 80-minute documentary on the making of the film which includes stop-motion footage trimmed from the movie, work-in-progress special effects footage of Rob Bottin's show-stopping effects, and behind-the-scenes location footage, as well as out takes and behind-the-scenes photographs. Accused of being excessive in the wake of *E.T.'s* success,

**John Carpenter's THE THING** holds up as a great monster movie. The LD and DVD special edition contains commentary from Carpenter and Kurt Russell.





# 1998 IN REVIEW

THE THING today seems relatively low-key and restrained, with Carpenter knowingly tightening the screws of suspense.

The lighter side of horror and fantasy are represented by two excellent releases. One is Image's release of David Lean's horror-comedy *BLITHE SPIRIT*, smartly adapted from Noel Coward's play. The film's special effects won an Academy Award, but what smartly crackles are the characterizations and witty lines as Rex Harrison plays a somewhat henpecked husband whose former wife's spirit is materialized by a dotty medium (a hilarious Margaret Rutherford) and then proceeds to haunt and taunt him. (For more information on this superb film, see Gary and Susan Svehla's *Cinematic Hauntings*.)

The other film, more familiar to horror fans, is Mel Brooks' 1974 spoof *YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN* (CBS/Fox), which lovingly sends up the James Whale classics. The DVD edition features a delightful running commentary by Brooks, along with seven (wisely) deleted scenes, including John Carradine's bit part as the late Baron Frankenstein, an extensive gallery of production photos, a 36-minute documentary, and some amusing interviews with Gene Wilder, Cloris Leachman, and Marty Feldman conducted by Mexican television.

It has been a banner year for Hammer releases as well. One of the greatest and most thoughtful



Toho's *GODZILLA VS KING GHIDORA* (above) reached DVD on a double bill with *GODZILLA VS MOTHRA*, but the disc failed to utilize the medium's full potential for an excellent presentation. On the other hand, TriStar's DVD for *GODZILLA* (left) spectacularly demonstrates the capability of digital sound.



science fiction films of all-time is *QUATERMASS AND THE PIT* (previously known in the U.S. as *FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH*), in which rocket scientist Bernard Quatermass uncovers a mystery that leads to the discovery of the origins of mankind and perhaps of evil itself. The discs (Elite on laser; Anchor on DVD) come with a commentary by director Roy Ward Baker and writer Nigel Kneale, which unfortunately is a bit slow and lackluster. (The DVD edition also includes a brief look at Hammer's science fiction efforts),

but the superb film itself is the main attraction. Also notable is the Roan Group's laserdisc release of *QUATERMASS II*, the second film in the series, which features two commentaries, one by director Val Guest and one by Nigel Kneale, who prompted by *The Hammer Story* author Marcus Hearne, comes off better on this disc.

For fans of Peter Cushing's Frankenstein series, two of the best, *CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN* and *FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED*, were released letterboxed for the first time by WB on laserdisc. *CURSE* features a highly intelligent script that develops the character of the Baron in the mode of a Byronic anti-hero, and the disc presents the climax in *CAV. MUST BE DESTROYED* may be the finest film

in the series, with the Baron now utterly ruthless and blind to the human consequences of his "humanitarian" efforts at brain transplantation, movingly limned by Freddy Jones who tries to return to his wife in his new body only to discover that she cannot accept him.

Hallmark's limited laser releases of *COUNTESS DRACULA*, *TWINS OF EVIL*, and *VAMPIRE CIRCUS* proved so popular that they went out of print almost immediately, which is a pity as they represent some of the best vampire films of the '70s, with the latter being a particular classic.

This was also the year of the Godzilla disc, as noted in a previous column about Simitar's releases. Additionally, Goodtimes brought *KING KONG VS. GODZILLA* to disc, presenting the Tohoscope image in a cropped, full

frame transfer, but offering up subtitles and alternate languages for their somewhat faded transfer. Also, TriStar released a DVD of two of the best latter day Godzilla movies, *GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORA* and *GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA: THE BATTLE FOR EARTH*, both cropped, dubbed and not taking advantage of DVD's technical possibilities. These films update the special effects techniques employed by the great grey wonder and feature cribbings from famous American films, especially *TERMINATOR*. *KING GHIDORA* has aliens tricking Earthlings into going back in time to try and stop the formation of Godzilla so that they can use Ghidora to take over the world of the future. The wildly colorful *MOTHRA* has the good moth god engaged in a battle with its own evil twin, Battra, to decide the fate of the Earth, with Godzilla acting as a kind of wild card, turning the final confrontation into a three-way showdown, a la *THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY*.

Also, though it was a highly disappointing film, Roland Emmerich's *GODZILLA* (TriStar) does spectacularly demonstrate DVD's ability to present terrific sound; the Dolby Digital blasts bring a new meaning to rumble. Rather than have a director-driven commentary, the DVD features the special effects team, Volker Engel and Karen Goulekas, with conceptual designer Patrick Tatopoulos as a late arrival.

Perhaps the most exciting and intelligent science fiction series of all-time was Patrick McGoochan's *THE PRISONER*. PolyGram has released all 17 episodes on nine discs, with two episodes to a disc. (The final episode is followed by a documentary featuring details about this finely crafted series.) Long out-of-print on tape and disc, this is a very welcome return of one of the most cerebral series ever made, which challenges audiences in ways most filmmakers today would not dare to do.

While some people have summarily written off the laserdisc format in favor of DVD, the Roan Group shows that as a medium aimed at a specialty market, laser is alive and well with their releases of some major Dario Argento movies, which we will cover in an upcoming column. This year, both formats had a great deal to offer the consumer, and one hopes that such a cornucopia of great titles and presentations will continue. □



## SOUNDTRAX

By Randall Larson

## THE OLD AND THE NEW: Classic reissues surpass new scores.

1998 will probably not be remembered as a stellar year for fantastic film music, but it did continue the trend of restoring, rerecording, and reissuing valuable soundtracks from years past, and it did provide a fistful of likable new scores.

### THE NEW

Once again Jerry Goldsmith was in top form with a splendid score for Joe Dante's inventive and quirky *SMALL SOLDIERS* (Varese Sarabande VSD 5963). The catchy main theme is playfully militaristic and instantly likable, offering a heroic tone driven by heavy percussion, horns and synths; the poignant theme for Archer and the Gorgonites is one of his loveliest. Taking on a darker tonality was Goldsmith's excellent horror score for *DEEP RISING* (Hollywood HR-62120-2). Cavernous echoes of low brass recall Akira Ifukube's gargantuan theme for Toho's *GODZILLA*, but Goldsmith's true theme shoots out of it with beaten piano and percussion underneath an agile motif for brass; the score maintains a claustrophobic atmospheric of near-edge panic through effective orchestration and a throbbing musical dynamic. Goldsmith's music for *STAR TREK INSURRECTION* (GNP Crescendo GNP 8059) balanced a pretty melody for the Ba'Ku with a flurry of predominant tonal dissonance—not as eloquent as *FIRST CONTACT*, but a superior work nonetheless.

*THE AVENGERS* (Compass COM0100) featured a pleasing symphonic-jazz-pop score by Joel McNeely, whose music neatly captured the action, sensuality, and bizarre science-fantasy embodied in this over-the-top incarnation of an already over-the-top 60s TV icon. Individual themes perfectly capture the essence of each character—self-assured, sexy, and fashionable. Laurie Johnson's original *AVENGERS* theme makes a reappearance over the end titles.

Nicholas Pike turned in a great symphonic score for *STARKID* (Sonic Images SID-8800), the latest nerdy-kid-saves-the-galaxy movie. The CD contains a high-energy heroic score with plenty of melody and dynamic thrust. Likewise David Michael Frank's sym-

phonic music for another kid-saves-the-universe film, *A KID IN ALADDIN'S PALACE* (Citadel STC 77117). This CD features a great digital transfer of a highly melodic and adventurous score. Cues are mostly short—totaling only 46 minutes—but they merge together nicely to create a rousing musical pageantry.

Michael Kamen's poignant score for Richard Matheson's metaphysical look at the afterlife, *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* (Beyond 63985-78039-2), is appropriately introspective; like Robin William's character, the music is searching, hopeful, and finally rapturous. (Mark Snow wrote the pretty, lyrical closing song.) Another tale of death and romance, *MEET JOE BLACK* (Universal UD-53229), received a quiet, articulate score from Thomas Newman, featuring some of his loveliest lyrical writing. The classically designed music whispers quietly, subtly underscoring the emotion of the story rather than its fantasy.

The brooding and evocative *CITY OF ANGELS* (Warner Sunset/Reprise 9 46867-2) featured one of Gabriel Yared's most touching scores. The CD contains four longish score cues after 10 angel-themed songs by various alternative pop artists, some of which dovetail nicely with the score's mood, some of which don't. But the orchestral yearnings and poignant melancholy of Yared's music make this a most compelling composition.

**MEET JOE BLACK** (starring Brad Pitt and Claire Forlani) received a lovely, lyrical score from Thomas Newman, underscoring emotion rather than fantasy.



Trevor Jones' score for *MERLIN* (Varese Sarabande VSD-5929) is eloquent and exotic, brimming with allusions to Arthurian folk legend while sustaining a romantic/melodic consistency. Jones' main theme is an especially fine heroic adventure motif, used nicely throughout the score to tie its circle of characters and events together.

James Horner, fresh from the success of 1997's *TITANIC*, turned in a cataclysmic score for the first of last year's two comets-versus-Earth doomstories, *DEEP IMPACT* (Sony Classical SK 60690), underscoring the characters with a soft introspective poignancy while his music for the incoming comet thunders with terrible intensity. The CD's sonic dynamic really lets Horner's percussive orchestration loose. So does the CD for Horner's *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG* (Hollywood HR-62172-2). The music thunders across the CD tracks much like the giant ape thundered across the African savanna and the LA freeways. Built around percussive and choral African motifs, Horner creates a primitive musical soundscape that embodies the misunderstood personality of the gorilla, the emotional bond between Joe and Jill, and the threat of the hunters.

John Van Tongeren's music for Peter Benchley's *CREATURE* (Intrada MAF 7081) runs along similar soil, initiating an undercurrent of voodoo, associated with the remote island from whence the creature comes, while a jagged, 3-note



Jerry Goldsmith was in top form for *SMALL SOLDIERS*, providing a poignant theme for Archer (above).

motif represents the creature itself. Van Tongeren provides a solid and well-orchestrated score in the action-suspense genre.

There were several impressive scores for animated fantasies last year. Jerry Goldsmith's music for *MULAN* skirted the Wilder-Zippel songs to create a powerful, adventurous orchestral score that enhanced the film's stylish visuals. The CD (Walt Disney 60631-7) provides both songs and score in a well-sequenced presentation. Goldsmith's music is energetic and often enormous; even its more intimate moments ("Mulan's Decision") capture a sturdy emotive strength.

Hans Zimmer emphasized the power of Hebrew legend in *PRINCE OF EGYPT* (Dreamworks DRMD-50041). Stephen Schwartz's songs were very much a part of the storytelling rather than stand alone set-pieces, while Zimmer's ethnically-derived instrumental score gave the production a lavish magnificence through broad orchestrations and abundant use of choir. Despite the preponderance of rearrangements of the songs for pop artists, the original score and songs are well preserved on the soundtrack CD.

Randy Newman seconded his wonderful score for *TOY STORY* in the computer-animated *A BUG'S LIFE* (Walt Disney 60634-7), while Harry Gregson-Williams and John Powell provided more



militaristic but grandly adventurous melodies for *ANTZ* (Angel 56782). Both are fun, exciting, and not entirely serious compositions.

In the horror arena, John Ottman crafted a dark musical fantasy for *SNOW WHITE: A TALE OF TERROR* (Citadel STC 77116). His music moves from lyrical and romantic to exotically spooky, using classical instrumentation enhanced by voices and synths. The result is moody and fascinating, achieving a rich sound design that is continually interesting—a tone poem for the darker undercurrents of the fairy tale. Ottman's menacing music for *HALLOWEEN H20* appeared anonymously on "Portrait of Terror" (Varese Sarabande STV-5986). Enhancing the John Carpenter piano-and-synth tonalities of earlier episodes, Ottman expands the music's scope with full orchestration and choir; the score takes on a threatening largeness that gives it an enormous power.

Moving *THE X-FILES* onto the big screen allowed composer Mark Snow to expand and enlarge his music from the TV series. The result (Elektra 62217-2) surges with power both restrained and unleashed. Snow intensifies the mystery and mythology of the show, amplifying its sense of cosmic wonder and conspiratorial terror with orchestral music embellished with synth textures. Snow's *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR* (Sonic Images SID-8811) is as eerie and ominous as any of his *X-FILES* music. Forbidding violin and synth

**For the kids' fantasy *STAR KID*, Nicholas Pike turned in a great symphonic score filled with dynamic energy and youthful heroism.**



**Mark Snow expanded the scope of his music for the first big-screen *X-FILES* adventure, starring David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson.**

inflections seep through the walls of this score, its delicate tonality is punctuated by moments of true musical scariness ("Chug's Libido," for example). Definitely one of the year's spookiest scores.

Craig Safan released a promo CD of his rejected music for *WOLFEN* (Miles End MED 3004). Unlike the rhythmic, melodic James Horner score that replaced it, Safan's effort was an abstract composition counterpointing wild, chilling notations, tonalities, and musical eruptions that achieved an unearthly, ominous mood, a bizarre and compelling assemblage of sounds not quickly forgotten.

## COMPILATIONS AND RESTORATIONS

In conjunction with The Sci-Fi Channel, TVT released a comprehensive 4-CD compilation of themes from science fiction, horror, and fantasy movies and series, *SCI-FI'S GREATEST HITS* (TVT1950, 1951, 1952, 1958). 135 original soundtrack themes are splattered out on separately themed discs. It's an amazing, versatile, and encyclopedic anthology of fantastic film music.

On the heels of the new *GODZILLA* movie, GNP Crescendo released *BEST OF GODZILLA 1954-1975* (GNPD 8055) and *1984-1995* (GNPD 8056), which presented original soundtrack cues

from all of the Japanese *Godzilla* films. The music takes on an interesting evolution through the series' run, from the apocalyptic orchestrations of Akira Ifukube and Masaru Sato to the modern orchestral sensibilities of Reijoroh Koro and Takayuki Hattori.

The first-ever collection of music specifically-written for movie and TV trailers appeared as a 2-CD set from Sonic Images entitled *COMING SOON!* (SID 2-8815). It featured the trailer music of John Beal, who has made his mark composing 1-2 minute scores for previews of films that don't yet have their final scores. Beal's music achieves a myriad of powerful emotions in seconds—truly a remarkable collection from a unappreciated subgenre of film music.

From England comes *THE HAMMER FILM MUSIC COLLECTION* (GDI GDICD002), a dynamic anthology of original soundtrack main title music from more than two dozen Hammer horrors. While the short cues assembled here don't do true justice to the Gothic-styled music that enhanced so many of these colorfully sinister horror films (single-film CDs are supposedly due in '99), the CD provides a fine introduction to just what was so good about Hammer horror film music.

After more than 20 years, Leonard Rosenman's milestone score for *FANTASTIC VOYAGE*

has seen the laser light of CD (FSM V1 N3). In the days before synthesizers, Rosenman achieved a remarkable sound design purely through acoustic instruments. His amazing musical journey inside the body is one of the genre's best scores. FSM also issued a 2-CD set of the full scores from four low-budget horrors composed by Gerald Fried (FSM V1 N4): *THE RETURN OF DRACULA*, *I BURY THE LIVING*, *THE CABINET OF CALIGARI*, and *MARK OF THE VAMPIRE*. None were classics, but Fried's music was among the best of low-budget '50s horror music, and it's great to have these four scores packaged together on CD.

One of James Horner's best scores *KRULL* (SuperTracks STCE-01/02), is back in a 2-CD set that offers the complete music for the first time. It's a massive, heroic adventure score featuring the London Symphony and the Ambrosian Singers. Other restored soundtracks of note include John Barry's last 007 score, *THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS* (Ryco RCD 10725) in a release that includes 9 cues not on the original LP, and Miklos Rozsa's magnificent score for *THE GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD* (Prometheus PCD 148); one of the composer's few pure fantasy scores, the music is brimming with exotic adventure and ferocious action, capably handled by one of film music's most venerable veterans. Varese Sarabande Records continued their laudable series of re-recorded scores, issuing lavish new versions, with John Debney conducting the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, of Bernard Herrmann's exotic *THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD* (VSD-5961), John Barry's poignant *SOMEWHERE IN TIME* (VSD-5911), and John Williams heroic *SUPERMAN* (2-CD set, VSD-5981), all of which are outstanding releases of superior scores.

Finally, from Germany comes the first CD release of an American LP classic, *NIGHT OF THE HUNTER* (Bear BCD 16 263 AJ). The record is a reading by Charles Laughton of Davis Grubb's short story—on which the Laughton-directed classic was based—underscored by Walter Schumann's music from the movie. The reading is brilliant, Laughton giving Grubb's poetic narrative just the right presentation; the music is provocative and symbolic; the colorful package includes the story's text set against photos from the film. □



## FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

### THE FACULTY

Director: Robert Rodriguez. Writer: Kevin Williamson. Dimension, 12/98. 101 mins. R. With: Elijah Wood, Laura Harris, Robert Patrick, Bebe Neuwirth, Famke Janssen, Piper Laurie, Salma Hayek.

The Kevin Williamson formula (rewrite familiar horror scenarios and have the characters note the familiarity) has gotten to be a bore, and in this case it makes no sense. In a story patterned after *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS* (though it stumbles closer to *INVADERS FROM MARS*), the characters surmise that films like *MIB* and *ID4* were made by aliens as a form of disinformation to fool us from recognizing a real invasion; yet the characters end up using science-fiction films as a foolproof blueprint to defeat the aliens!

Still, the film is more interesting than the overrated *SCREAM*-fests. The high school setting, with the faculty gradually being taken over, actually works, because conformity and peer pressure are such a big part of the characters' lives. The plot generates empathy and suspense as its outcast students band together to fight off the alien menace; their growing paranoia is nicely handled, and the litmus test (each proves he or she is still human by snorting caffeine) is a hoot. Most interesting is the idea that the people who have been snatched are actually improved by their condition: the hard-ass coach turns into an understanding guy; the mousy teacher (Janssen in a stunning piece of Jekyll-Hyde work) turns into a self-confident vamp.

Unfortunately, the potential in this idea is never realized, because the filmmakers don't trust it to hold our interest; instead, they pander to their target teen audience with copious computer effects, plus gratuitous and gory stalk-and-slash scenes. (Why does the football coach [Patrick] drive a pencil into the hand of the principal [Neuwirth], when the aliens want to snatch bodies, not slash them? Because the film needed a shocking image in the opening reel!) It's hard to feel frightened by the temptation of the alien's promise of blissful conformity when we see evil pod people slashing their victims to death. Director Rodriguez is as much to blame for this: a fine action specialist, he has the most fun when all hell breaks loose; a long, slow, suspenseful buildup doesn't interest him. Still, he keeps things lively and interesting, even when they get silly: the film ends with a romantic kiss between the geek and the head cheerleader (easily the most unbelievable image in the movie), and a closing montage of the cast shows all the pod people back to normal—even those who were shot, decapitated and stabbed in the eye!

●● Steve Biodrowski



**IN DREAMS:** Annette Bening plays Claire Cooper, a woman haunted by surreal dreams—the results of a telepathic link with a demented serial killer.

### IN DREAMS

Director: Neil Jordan. Screenplay: Bruce Robinson and Neil Jordan, from the novel "Dolls Eyes" by Bari Wood. DreamWorks, 1/99. 99 mins. R3. With: Annette Bening, Aidan Quinn, Robert Downey Jr., Stephen Rea

Neil Jordan makes a valiant attempt to put the horror back into the horror film, and he succeeds, though not quite to the level he intended. The film eschews the post-*SCREAM* jokiness in favor of serving its scares straight up, without any comic relief to ease the tension. The result is often creepy, and fascinating to watch, but the plot doesn't involve the audience to the point where the film achieves a level of metaphysical dread comparable to *SEVEN*. The weakness here is a story that contains familiar elements from several movies, including *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* and *EYES OF LAURA MARS*: Clair Cooper (Bening) has nightmare visions-premonitions of a child killer, but the police (of course) don't believe her—until the facts finally prove her correct. Jordan's approach to this material is to de-emphasize the clichés—but they're still there, and he does little new with them.

Instead, the film rides on the power of its imagery: a town flooded to create a reservoir, a child's costume angel wings dangling on a bush after she has been abducted, Claire's surreal dreams and glimpses of the Beyond. The later are particular arresting, making nice use of CG morphing to introduce each dream by "bending" it onto the screen. When Downey, Jr. shows up in the final reel as the killer, the film shifts into high-intense suspense and works quite effectively. With no last-minute rescue, the story takes its premonitions seriously, working inexorably to a predetermined end that leaves most of the major characters dead. The result is sad, though not quite as harrowing as it should have been. Fortunately, an excellent epilogue delivers a truly cathartic piece of poetic justice upon the villain.

●● 1/2 Steve Biodrowski

### JACK FROST

Director: Troy Miller. Writers: Mark Steven Johnson, Steve Bloom, Jonathan Roberts and Jeff Cesario. WB, 12/98. 105 mins. PG. With: Michael Keaton, Kelly Preston, Mark Addy, Joseph Cross, Henry Rollins.

*JACK FROST* has an extremely suspect premise for a children's movie: Dad dies and comes back as a snowman. If it was supposed to be a black comedy, it would be wonderfully perverse. But this is not a black comedy. It may have been once (that would explain Sam Raimi's previous involvement); instead, it was marketed to tots. If I had any, I'm not sure I'd take them. But who would I take? Maybe all those fifteen-year-old girls who loved *TITANIC*? There's no Leo, but there is plenty of romance, tears, and a happy-sad kind of ending.

Michael Keaton is incredibly likable as Jack Frost, a role that departs dramatically from his recent repertoire of psychos and brooding superheroes. Kelly Preston is equally appealing as Gaby, Jack's practical wife. They live suspiciously well for an unsigned jazz musician and a bank employee: a house, a nicely furnished mountain cabin, and a new four-wheel drive vehicle. Yet Jack claims they are struggling. Inconsistencies like this run amok, and neither writers nor director seem to have paid much attention.

The film deals with big issues: what's really important in life. It's manipulative, like most of its ilk (Jack dies on the way back to his family after realizing how important they are to him), but its biggest crime is being formulaic. Still, there are small rewards. When the dialogue isn't heavy-handed, it's more irreverent and genuine than most family fare, delivered by a talented group of actors. Jim Henson's Creature Shop snowman is outstanding; his mobility and expressiveness are divine, and Keaton's voice gives him heart. If you can get past the bizarre premise, you may be able to enjoy yourself 105 minutes.

● Sonya Burres

## BORDERLAND: "Enemy of the State"

By Anthony P. Montesano

In its attempt to present a cautionary tale of the loss of personal privacy in the "surveillance society," *ENEMY OF THE STATE* (Buena Vista, 11/98, R, 128 mins) pushes the application of contemporary tracking technology to the edge of science fiction. The film would have us believe not only that the technology in the storyline is possible today, but also that it has in fact been in use for some time. In theory that may be true, but I guarantee you that it still takes longer to boot your computer than it does for a group of rouge government agents in this film to track—from a satellite in space—not only the country, but the state, city, street, building and floor on which Will Smith is standing!

This speed and the accuracy is simply not believable, but this Tony Scott-directed, "1984"-like thrill ride never succeeds better than when it keeps the action moving so fast you don't have time to think. For example: why can the sophisticated government agency pinpoint the exact whereabouts of Smith at all times, but not detect that a video camera, set up to document wildlife, is aimed directly at the murder committed by the agency's leader (played with icy control by Jon Voight)? Such holes in the logic, combined with an over-reliance on the whiz-bang nature of the technology, reduce the film, on more than one occasion, to the point of unintentional hilarity.

That said, this borderland effort scores big points with the droll casting of Gene Hackman. As "Brill," a former American spy forced underground, Hackman does a '90s riff on the surveillance expert he played in Francis Ford Coppola's 1974 classic of techno-paranoia, *THE CONVERSATION*. When Hackman teams with Smith, the unlikely pairing of actors fills the screen with genuine sparks. And Hackman's high tech hideout is a glimpse of what the Batcave should have been.

The plot has a lawyer (Smith) unsuspectingly given the evidence of a Senator's murder. Soon the government is hot on Smith's heels trying to obtain and destroy the evidence. We've seen this all before. (In fact, Hitchcock crafted an entire career of such plots: *THE 39 STEPS*, *NORTH BY NORTHWEST*, and *THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH*, etc.)

*ENEMY OF THE STATE* never takes itself seriously enough to truly frighten us with its message of government invasion of privacy. The film does make you wonder however, who exactly might be watching you the next time you step out of the shower in a hotel room. *ENEMY OF THE STATE* would argue his name might just be Big Brother. Or is it Uncle Sam? □



## ART HOUSE: "Shattered Image"

By Dan Persons

It would appear that Raúl Ruiz, helmer of **SHATTERED IMAGE** (Lions Gate, 12/98; 103 mins; unrated), is a card-carrying member of the Claude Chabrol fan club. Clearly inspired by Hitchcock, the French director Chabrol has succeeded—in such rococo murder mysteries as **LES BICHES**, **LE BOUCHER**, and **LA CEREMONIE**—at transferring the Master's mix of gothic romanticism, moral ambivalence, character interaction, and visceral horror to contemporary times, offering up heroines who contend with love and death under the blue-cast glow of fluorescent lights.

Those fluorescents are evident in the cold-steel Seattle where a portion of **IMAGE** is set, balanced by the tropical greenery of the film's other location, Jamaica. In getting from one site to the next, Ruiz (through a script by Duane Poole) has posited a storyline of enigmatic duality. Is protagonist Jessie (Anne Parillaud) a cold-blooded hitwoman in a helmet-like, black shock-wig, plying her trade in grunge's hometown? Or is she a wide-eyed newlywed escaping her past in tropical climes? Is her next victim, Brian (William Baldwin), the man she has inadvertently fallen in love with; or is Brian the husband into whose arms she has fled in order to purge memories of a violent attack, only to find herself suspecting his motives. Jessie the killer repeatedly wakes up into Jessie the bride's life; newlywed Jessie keeps rousing in the gunwoman's reality. Neither is sure whose life is the true one, whose Brian can be trusted, and whether all that occurs is a glimpse of the past, the present, or the future.

It's an intriguing set-up, one which Ruiz handles well, even if his eye for scenic style sometimes overrides his instinct for plausibility (hint to travelers: if your restaurant's men's room has more than four stalls, don't order the bouillabaisse). Where **IMAGE** falters, big time, is in the casting of Parillaud. Jessie would be, admittedly, a demanding role for any actress, given her requisite swing from contract killer to vulnerable victim. Unfortunately, Parillaud hardly seems able to scrape up enough personality for one world, much less two (language barrier may be at fault here—it appears the actress isn't much past the phonetic stage in her command of English).

Without the human portal into this complex mind-game, Ruiz's scenario becomes more remote than even the director probably intended. By the time the film has reached its over-elaborate finale (Ruiz has worked in at least five conclusions too many), the revelation of the truth (such as it is) has no impact to speak of. Even steel has a melting point; Ruiz hasn't found it. □



Although DreamWorks **PRINCE OF EGYPT** is based on the Bible's book of *Exodus*, the story is derived at least as much from **BEN HUR**, including a chariot race between two childhood friends who become enemies as adults.

## ANIMATION

### PRINCE OF EGYPT

Directors: Simon Wells, Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner. Screenplay: Phil LaZebnick, based on the Book of Exodus. 12/98. 97 mins. PG. Voices: Val Kilmer, Ralph Fiennes, Sandra Bullock, Michelle Pfeiffer, Jeff Goldblum, Danny Glover, Patrick Stewart, Steve Martin, Martin Short.

Well, they did it. After more positive and negative pre-publicity than any animated feature since Walt Disney's first "folly," **SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS**, DreamWorks' **THE PRINCE OF EGYPT** has bucked "the system," by successfully bringing to life in animation a most non-conventional story, in a unique way. And while the film may not change the course of animation, watching it is still a distinct, fresh and enthralling experience.

**PRINCE OF EGYPT** removes all expectations and archetypes that have become the comforts of animation. Subtle "acting" among the characters and dialogue-driven scenes take the place of slapstick and fast-paced bits of business. The film even adds its own depth to the Old Testament tale, by crafting Moses and Rameses as brothers torn apart by their own destinies. As a result, the characters emerge as more empathetic than your standard hero and villain. Like Moses and Rameses, each character in the film is a stunning accomplishment of slower-paced character animation.

**PRINCE OF EGYPT** also takes full advantage of merging live-action sensibilities with animation, while never letting the film "fall out" of its animated realm. Its pleasing and distinct artistry, coupled with David Lean-es-

que images, makes almost every scene a jaw-dropper (especially the chariot race between Moses and Rameses—one of the greatest action set pieces ever staged in animation).

Where **PRINCE OF EGYPT** falters is when it tries to force some of animation's conventions on the story: comic support Hotep and Hoy are underdeveloped distractions, and the Plagues, set in a montage song sequence, are underwhelming. Nevertheless, **THE PRINCE OF EGYPT** does what many non-Disney animated features don't: it dares to take chances and then manages to make them pay off.

●●● 1/2 Mike Lyons

## TELEVISION

### FUTURESPOUR

Director: Ernest Dickerson. Writer: Robert Hewitt Wolfe, based on a story by Wolfe and Steve DeJarnatt. ABC, 9/98. 120 mins, w/commercials. TV14. With: Dean Cain, Vanessa L. Williams, Wesley Snipes

This is a piece of ultra-derivative science-fiction about a world sport called Futuresport, in which the participants race around on rollerblades or zoom about on hover boards to get a fist-sized ball into a hole. Originally created by Fixx (Snipes, also co-exec producer) in the urban Down Zone to keep peace among the gangs, it was taken by super-duper sports star Trey Ramsey—along with sometimes girlfriend and TV reporter Alex Torrez—and turned into a world-wide phenomenon that now has to solve the political problems of the violent Hawaiian Liberation Organization, which has put the world at the brink of war. In this final game, winner takes all.

This **ROLLERBALL JR.** has some money behind it (most likely thanks to Snipes), some good effects, and loads of blue lighting to substitute for atmosphere (as well as a goodly portion of green light, just for a change of scenery), but it is not only derivative of that fondly-recalled 1975 feature—it also has a touch of **BLADE RUNNER** and just a hint of the sadly short-lived **MAX HEADROOM** from 1986. The Trey-Alex love affair is uninteresting and just as stale as anything else in this quaint little TV pic. Snipes, oddly enough, is the most interesting character, letting some humor show through, and there are some good turns from supporting players, but so many clichés fly about with that little ball that anything interesting about the film is blunted almost immediately.

● Frederick C. Szebin

## NATIONAL LAMPOON'S: MEN IN WHITE

Director: Scott Levy. Writers: Rob Kerchner and Scott Sandin. Fox Family Channel 9/98. 120 mins, w/commercials. With: Tom Wilson, Karim Prince, Barry Bostwick, M. Emmet Walsh, Brion James, George Kennedy.

Saban Entertainment, the company that brought us such envelope-pushing productions as **MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS** and **BIG BAD BEETLEBORGS**, offered up this genuinely stupid waste of film that follows the adventures of two sanitation workers, Roy (Prince) and Ed (Wilson, who was so good as all the evil incarnations of Biff in the **BACK TO THE FUTURE** movies). The duo get abducted by aliens, but they escape by wielding an alien fire extinguisher. Afterward, they are recruited by Doctor Strangemeister, a wheelchair-bound loony working for the aliens who want to get the boys back because the fire extinguisher isn't up to code! (haw-haw) Roy and Ed become the Men In White, a two-man task force designed to watch the skies for invaders so that bad aliens won't destroy everything this country stands for, including Barney the Dinosaur.

**AIRPLANE!**, more than **MEN IN BLACK**, is the inspiration for this struggling live-action cartoon that attempts to achieve the irreverence of a Warner Brothers animated short subject. The few flimsy moments of genuine humor are offered by such sights as attacking aliens passing over the moon while Dean Martin sings "That's Amore," and bumper stickers on the flying saucers with slogans like, "If you can read this—you're in space," "I'd rather be abducting," and "Got cows?" For all of its silly characters, dopey one-liners, mercenary girl scouts and inherent goofiness, **MEN IN WHITE** simply isn't funny. The level of humor barely rises above the childish antics of **POWER RANGERS**, although there is a cute bit paying homage to the film's namesake with a memory eraser. Everything else in this hard-to-watch nonsense falls flat on its face, scene after scene, until only undiscerning seven-year-olds would be left watching.

○ Frederick C. Szebin



## BIBLIOFILE

By Dan Cziraky

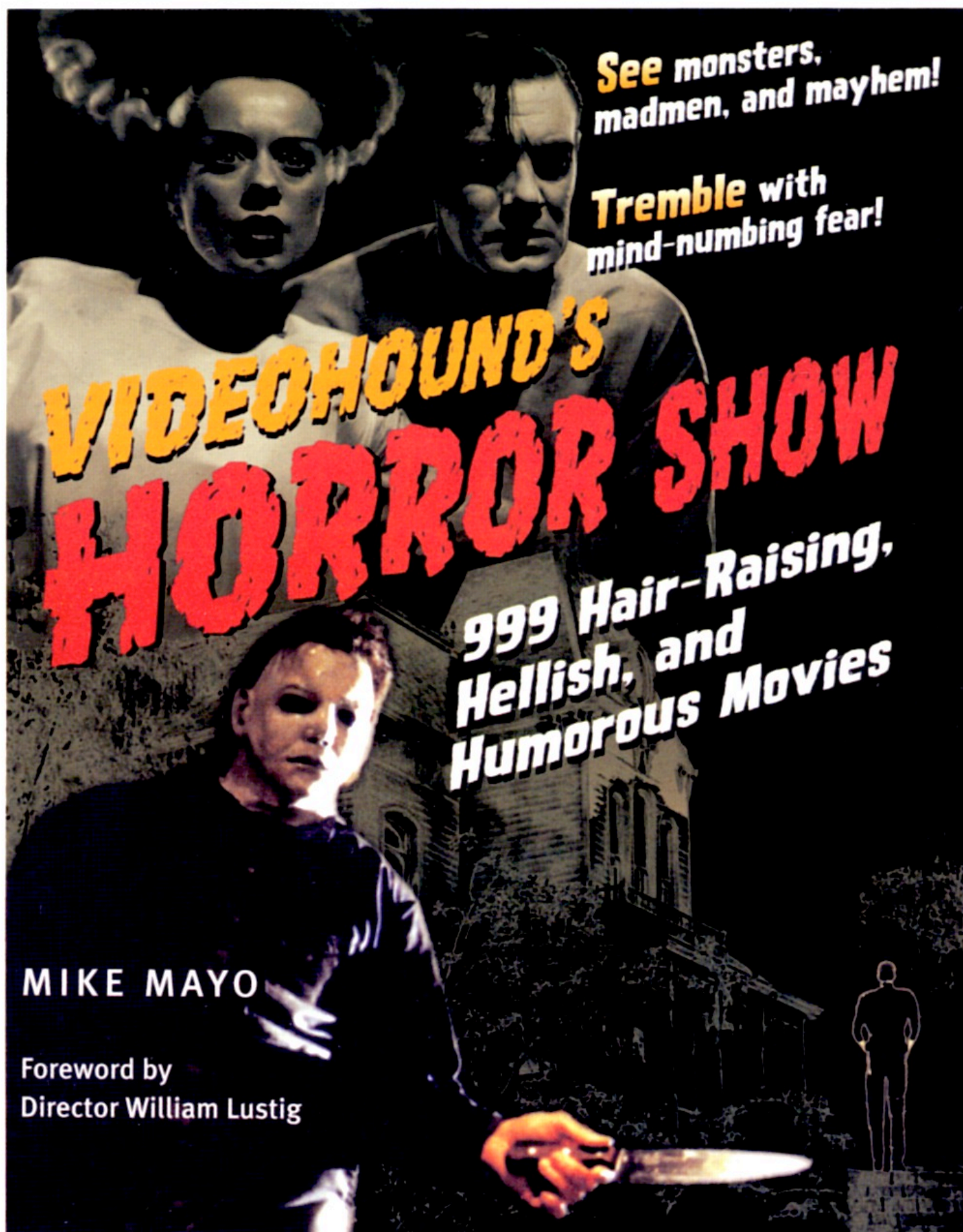
## HAIR-RAISING, HELLISH, HUMOROUS *The Invasion of the Genre Movie Guides continues.*

For a period around Halloween, genre-movie books pop up on store shelves like tombstones in a literary cemetery: movie guides, show-biz biographies, and overblown "Making of ..." tomes, their covers like epitaphs. The difference, of course, is that these new books are far from being etched in stone.

Joining the rapidly growing line of "VideoHound Guides" from Visible Ink Press is *VideoHound's Horror Show: 999 Hair-Raising, Hellish, and Humorous Movies*, by Mike Mayo (August 1998, 524 pages, \$17.95). Like their *Sci-Fi Experience*, *Cult Flicks and Trash Pics*, and *Vampires on Video* books, Visible Ink once again visits the realm of A-Z video listings, with sidebars on pertinent subjects (Universal Pictures, Hammer Films, George A. Romero, Boris Karloff, and even Full Moon maven Charles Band); indexes to cross-reference actors, directors, and alternate film titles; video distributor contact lists; and, a section on horror-related websites, fan clubs, books, magazines (including *CFQ!*), and newsletters. Director William Lustig (MANIAC) contributes a foreword discussing his film restoration efforts with rare horror titles through Anchor Bay Entertainment. Author Mayo reviews films for the Internet video magazine *99 Lives*, and also wrote *VideoHound's Video Premieres*. Knowledgeable and direct, Mayo has included some non-horror titles, such as TAXI DRIVER, DELIVERANCE, and THE WIZARD OF OZ, because of certain "deeply frightening" scenes. Unfortunately, Mayo has ignored certain esoteric titles, such as DARKNESS, AT MIDNIGHT I'LL TAKE YOUR SOUL, and NEKROMANTIK, that haven't been in previous "VideoHound" genre books, either. While it's a worthy addition to the burgeoning genre-guide trend launched over a decade ago with Michael J. Weldon's *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*, and nicely illustrated with over 100 b&w photos, less than a thousand titles for the cover price makes it a poor value for the money.

If Visible Ink is trying to dominate the sci-fi and horror movie reference guide market, they'll have to do a lot better than J. Gordon Melton's *The Vampire Gallery: A Who's Who of the Undead* (September 1998, 500 pages, \$19.95). As a companion to Melton's *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead* and *VideoHound's Vampires on Video*, it continues Melton's tradition of earnest, scholarly attempts massively flawed by startlingly obvious, factual errors. Filled with "biographical data" on over 350 vampire characters (and a smattering of vampire hunters) from films, television, literature, comic books, and even role-playing games, it's the kind of reference book that vampire aficionados might have given their eye-teeth for.

Starting off with a lengthy chapter on Count Dracula's various incarnations, the book then lists alphabetically characters from the well-



Mike Mayo's new book is a worthy, knowledgeable addition to the burgeoning number of genre guides.

known (THE NIGHT STALKER's Janos Skozzeny and Anne Rice's Lestat de Lioncourt) to the obscure (Jonathan Morris as Ash in 1996's VAMPIRE JOURNALS). Ever wonder what the vampire's name in 1987's GRAVEYARD SHIFT was? Look up the title in the Index, turn to page 381, and there's 300-year-old Stephen Tsepes, at your service. However, is the information accurate? Look up Mario Bava's BLACK SUNDAY (1960), and you'll see that Barbara Steele's vampire-witch is listed as Princess Ada. Watch the movie, and it's really Princess Asa. Melton gives Count Dracula's alias in both HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1944) and HOUSE OF DRACULA (1945) as

Count Latos, when a quick viewing of either film reveals it to be Baron Latos. Did TV's FOREVER KNIGHT run for three or four seasons? It depends upon which entry you read: the one for Nick Knight says three, but the one for Lucien LaCroix says four (the later being the correct answer). Not even photo captions are exempt from Melton's bumbling—a photo of androgenous male vampire Belle from FRIGHT NIGHT II is labeled as depicting female vampire Regine (Julie Carmen). I'm not certain if Melton, who sponsored the DRACULA '97 centennial expo in Los Angeles, is a well-meaning incompetent or just a careless hack, but I do know that Visible Ink should be



ashamed of publishing such shoddily researched work. A second, revised edition of *The Vampire Book* was scheduled for November; I can't wait to see what marvelous, all-new mistakes Melton has in store for us.

*All I Need to Know About Filmmaking I Learned From THE TOXIC AVENGER* by Lloyd Kaufman and James Gunn (Berkeley Boulevard, August 1998, 336 pages, \$14.00), asks the question: is Troma Team president and co-founder Kaufman a quasi-retarded nebbish with a breast fixation who just happens to be a Yale University graduate, or is he just playing one in real life? Featuring an introduction by producer-director Roger Corman—who refuses to take the blame for being Kaufman's inspiration—this autobiography proceeds to relate the story of how Kaufman and partner Michael Herz (who absolutely refused to cooperate in the writing of the book) formed Troma, the independent distributor of such twisted film fare as *SURF NAZIS MUST DIE!* (1987), *CANNIBAL! THE MUSICAL* (1996), and *TROMEO & JULIET* (1996). Kaufman rants and curses through it all, trying to pass off three-foot penis-monster puppets and BromoSeltzer-and-green-food-coloring vomit as "creative visions." Through all the fart

The new novel *Return of the Wolfman* picks up the Universal horror saga where the film *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN*



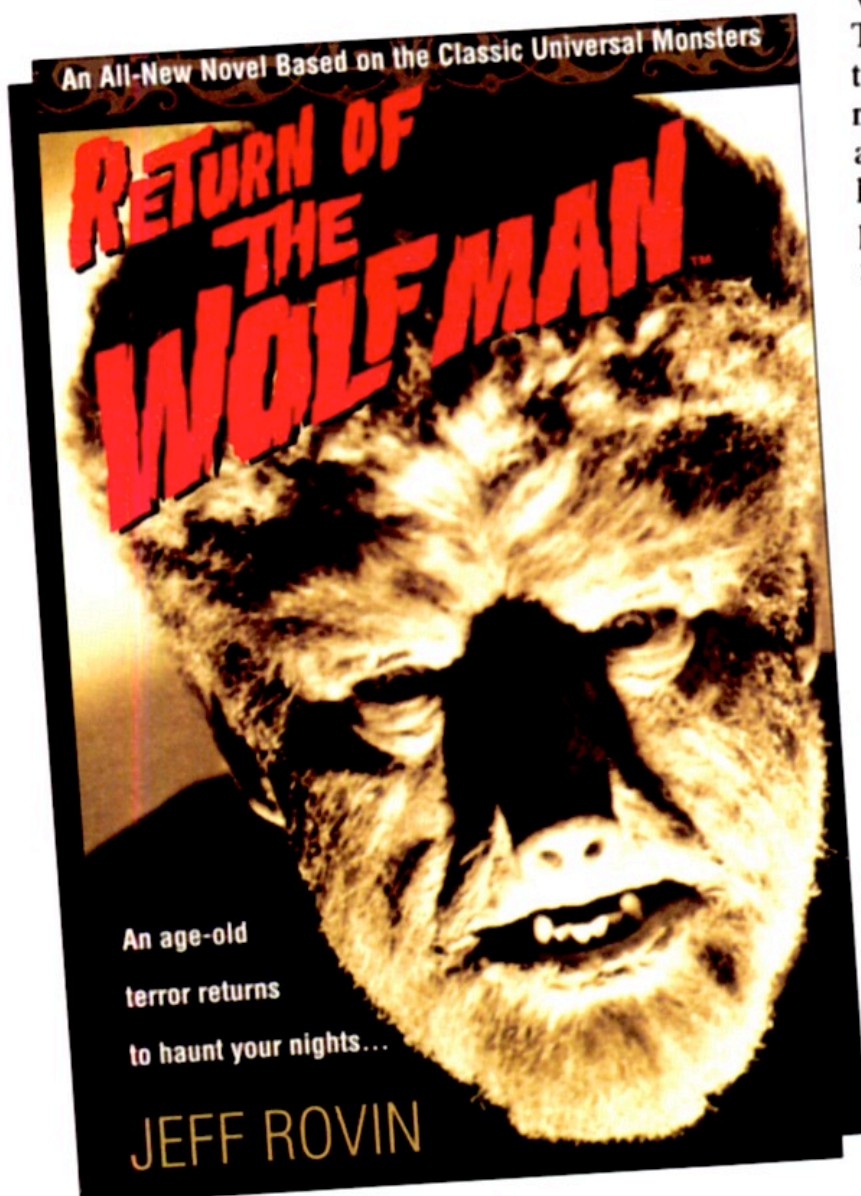
Videohound's Horror Show guide also contains listings of non-horror titles like *THE WIZARD OF OZ* (with Margaret O'Brien) because of certain "deeply frightening scenes."

jokes and assorted nonsense, we do glimpse the quirky inner-workings of this bizarre, surprisingly successful filmmaker, from his days as location manager on *SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER* to his frenzied publicity-mongering each year at the Cannes Film Festival for movies like *RABID GRANNIES* and *KILLER CONDOM*. We also get the rare human moments, such as when his beloved wife Pat (ironically, the New York State Film Commissioner), was diagnosed with breast cancer, to his crushing disappointment of having New Line Cinema renege on their deal to produce the live-action *TOXIC CRUSADERS* movie in favor of making *TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III*. Fortunately, just when you start to believe Kaufman might, deep down, be a normal human being after all, he starts to rave about the glories of foam-rubber flesh, raw-hamburger head-crushings, and on-screen nipple-piercings. He despises such things as continuity, and explains why he will have none of that in his films. While it's all pretty funny and interesting, in a nine car pile-up on-the-free-way fashion, Kaufman is the first to admit that the book is utterly useless as the guide to independent filmmaking that it was intended to be. Actually, with the assistance of *TROMEO & JULIET* co-scripter Gunn, Kaufman does give budding directors great tips on what not to do in order to get anything but an NC-17 rating out of the MPAA.

Early '90s, big-budget monster movies like *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, *MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN*, and *THE WOLF MAN*. Alas, those days are gone forever—unless, that is, you read *Return of the Wolf Man* (Berkeley Boulevard, October 1998, 339 pages, \$6.99) by Jeff Rovin, a film historian who has written extensively about those classic Universal horror films. This original novel begins where 1948's *ABBOTT & COSTELLO MEET*

existence. She agrees, then hides the body in the castle's cellar, hoping it will never be discovered. Fifty years later, the new owner of Castle Mornay, Dr. Caroline Cooke, prepares to move in. A freak accident brings the Wolf Man back to life, during the full moon. Killing two innocents, Talbot begs Cooke to help him to die, but the two are soon embroiled in a series of horrific events that not only see the return of the badly injured Monster, but brings them to the attention of a vengeful Count Dracula.

Rovin carefully crafts his story, remaining fairly faithful to the original interpretations of the monsters as the story's present-day setting will allow. The gore factor is far beyond anything ever depicted in the original films, and at times is intrusively excessive. Rovin does a good job with Talbot's dialogue, but Dracula is a hollow bogeyman, and the Monster is an outlandish, eight-foot-tall caricature of Boris Karloff's most memorable performance. Still, there's a lot to recommend the book, including a wild helicopter ride with the enraged Monster and a great, sepia-tinted photo of Lon Chaney, Jr., in full Wolf Man makeup on the cover. The ending sets the stage for a sequel in this on-going series. It will be interesting to see if this Universal Monsters book series can sustain the same level of interest and action that has been exhibited by Random House's *Godzilla* series by Marc Cerasini (inspired by the Toho films, not the TriStar blasphemy). The four books to date (*Godzilla Returns*, *Godzilla 2000*, *Godzilla at World's End*, and *Godzilla vs. the Robot Monsters*) have been entertaining and action-packed, if somewhat limited by their self-imposed general audiences formats. With no such restraints imposed on the Universal series, at least as far as the levels of violence are concerned, the books can literally grab readers by the throats and then tear them out! Too much of this gratuitous gore, however, may soon erode the sympathy that fans have felt for these horror icons for over 60 years. □





## RESURRECTIONS

By Steve Biodrowski

## UNIVERSAL HORROR:

*Black-and-white classics return to the big screen.*

To any horror film fan, the Universal classics from the 1930s and 1940s (well, at least the '30s) hold a hallowed place in the heart, but how many of us have had the chance to see these films on the big screen? Well, that chance occurred last year, when Universal Pictures struck new prints of a dozen films and sent them on a house tour entitled Universal Horror. The six double bills included: *FRANKENSTEIN* and *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, *DRACULA* and *DRACULA'S DAUGHTER*, *THE MUMMY* and *THE BLACK CAT*, *THE WOLFMAN* and *FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN*, *THE INVISIBLE MAN* and *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN*, and finally *MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE* and *HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN*.

My earliest recollection of watching a Universal Horror film is encountering *FRANKENSTEIN* sometime in the mid-'60s while my parents were channel surfing one night. While the adults dismissed the film as being "over 30 years old" and changed the channel, my siblings and I were fascinated by this strange artifact from the past and rushed downstairs to watch it on the small black-and-white television. Something about the age lent a strange patina to the film; the fact, that it was so old, rather than making it seem dated, somehow made it seem like...well, I guess that's when I learned the word "classic."

That strange sense of otherworldliness is still apparent in Universal's films from that era, and it was amply on display at Universal Horror. The film may not be frightening to modern filmgoers, but they are not mere dated, campy relics from an age long gone. At times, the artistry was stunning and vivid; certainly, no contemporary film I saw that week—particularly a contemporary horror film—could stand comparison to the best work seen there.

The prints were in excellent, though not perfect condition (it's sad to think that, even with Universal's best efforts, the films still show signs of age), and the audiences were enthusiastic and responsive, reminding one of the im-



Among the classic Universal horror movies screened in newly struck prints was James Whale's *FRANKENSTEIN*, with Colin Clive and Boris Karloff.

portant impact a group dynamic can have on one's experience of a film. There were even a few surprises: films that had stood the test of time better than expected.

The films of James Whale (*FRANKENSTEIN*, *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*, and *THE INVISIBLE MAN*) hold up as entertaining cinema thanks to the director's quirky eccentricity, which continues to amuse, even if the films have lost the power to shock (although the death of Dr. Waldman in the first film is still effective).

*DRACULA* holds up better than its reputation, especially when compared to its overrated sequel. Admittedly, *DRACULA'S DAUGHTER* is more entertaining than I remembered, but a *Dracula* film without *Dracula* will never rank high in my book, and the film's much-vaunted lesbian undertones are restricted to one brief suggestive scene. Then you have to sit through the rest of the movie, which has a bit of trouble linking vampire Countess Maria Zaleski to her alleged father: she claims to be *Dracula's* daughter at one point, but she also has fond childhood memories of her mother playing soothing harpsichord music. So she was *Dracula's* daughter by a human mother? She had a normal, happy childhood before her fa-

ther...what? Bit her? Also, her Renfield character, Zandor, is a bit mouthy for a mere human serving a vampire. Why does she put up with him?

The highlights of the show were *MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE* and *THE BLACK CAT*, perhaps because they never held a particular childhood fascination for me; in fact, I found both to be boring, and it's easy to see why, in retrospect: no monster scenes. But both films turn out to have a mature approach to horror that is still effective today. For *MURDERS*, director Robert Florey took a few elements from Edgar Allan Poe's story and grafted them onto a tale of evolutionary science gone mad. Curiously, the film paints Dr. Mirakle (Bela Lugosi) as evil because he supports the theory, but the plot seems built around suggesting that he is right. His failed experiment on Arlene Francis (trying to mix her blood with that of an ape, to prove that man and ape are related) is genuinely unnerving, with her character tied up as if in some weird sadomasochistic bondage movie, her continuous screaming at full volume a forerunner of a similar sequence in *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*, decades later. It's a pity that Florey wasn't given more opportunity at Universal.

*THE BLACK CAT*, the first and best teaming of Lugosi and Boris Karloff, is more revenge drama than horror film, and it has even less to do with Poe than *MURDERS*, but it justifies its genre label with the Satanic overtones of the Karloff character and with a genuine sense of underlying perversity, of people whose souls have been "killed slowly" by the real-life atrocities of World War One. The film has a very contemporary air, thanks to the (for the time) futuristic set design of Karloff's House of Doom (the title in England); the art deco decor, however, cannot hide the shroud of death permeating the premises: when the young lead is unable to phone for help, Karloff cackles, "Did you hear that, Vitus? The phone is dead! Even the phone is dead!" Casting Lugosi as the nominal hero has wonderful results, mostly because his character is almost as unhinged as the villain. Locked in mortal combat, the only thing that separates him from his adversary is some concern for the innocent victims caught in the crossfire. Other than that, we are asked to identify with him, even as he finally loses all restraint and flays his tormentor alive!

Universal's efforts in the 1940s never lived up to this early work:

continued on page 62

Bela Lugosi and Lon Chaney grapple in a publicity still for *FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN*.





## THE WATCHER

By Dan Cziraky

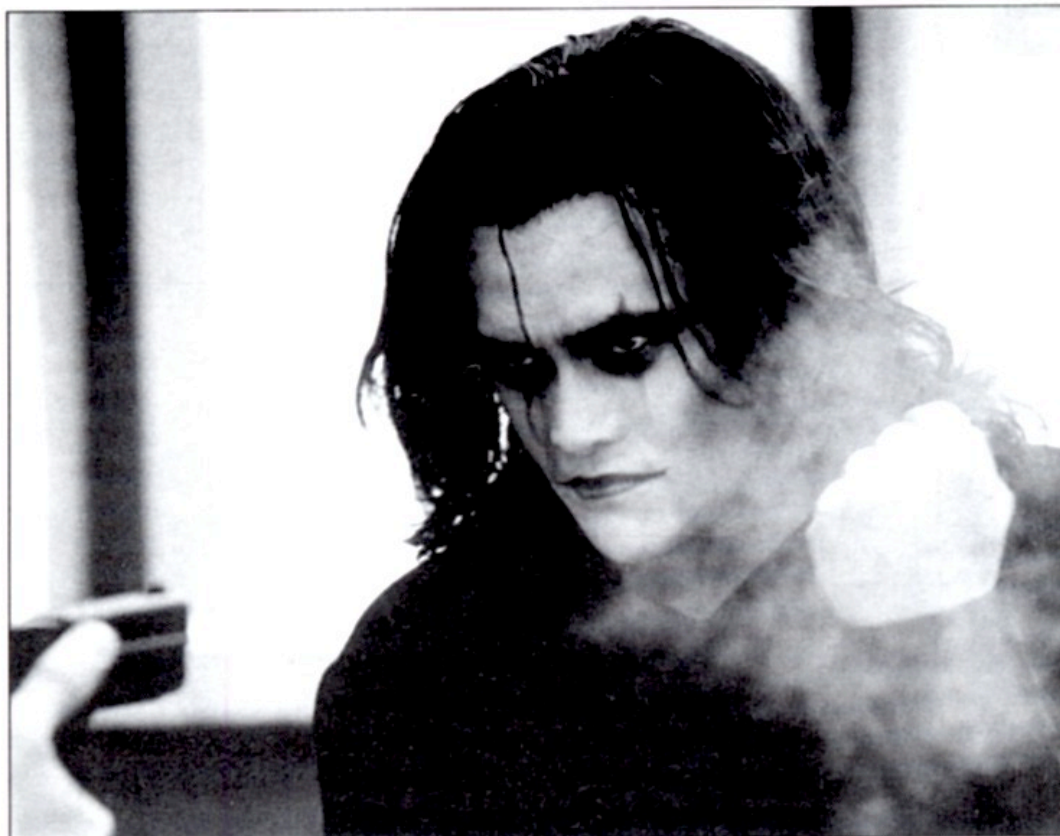
## DEJA VU

*Familiar ideas return to life on television.*

STAR TREK, X-FILES, and BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER get lots of press, and deservedly so; however, they aren't the only genre shows on the tube these days. Some of the following titles might be ones you've been purposely avoiding, and I'm not saying they're must-see TV by any means, but you should give them the benefit of the doubt and at least scope them out for yourself.

I'll admit, I was leery of THE NEW ADDAMS FAMILY (Fox Family Channel, 7:30 PM ET, Mon.-Fri.). After the ADDAMS FAMILY REUNION movie was bumped from its debut on Fox and went direct-to-video, I knew things were bad; the once-noble Addams clan had hit rock bottom, thanks to the heavy-handed clods at Saban Entertainment, purveyors of such kiddie-fare swill as MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS and BEETLEBORGS.

I tuned in to the debut episode of the series expecting to be similarly underwhelmed; in fact, given that Jerry Van Dyke (MY MOTHER THE CAR) was the show's first guest-star, I was prepared to be nauseated! Van Dyke was a bank robber who hides out in the Addams house to avoid the cops. Of course, the Addams' are delighted at the prospect of being bound and gagged and tortured and robbed. While the premiere episode was somewhat lackluster, subsequent viewings have proven that there is still life in this warhorse concept, as well as a dash of sly, black humor. Glenn Taranto does a shameless yet rather convincing impersonation of John Astin as Gomez, if just a tad less antic and wild-eyed. (Astin has a recurring role as Grandpapa Addams on the show.) Ellie Harvie deadpans Morticia just as easily as Carolyn Jones or Huston ever did, and is certainly a major improvement over the wooden Daryl Hannah in REUNION, but she lacks the smoldering sexuality necessary for the job. Michael Roberds is a younger clone of Jackie Coogan's Uncle Fester, yet lacks Coogan's comedic gifts and the subtly psychotic menace of Lloyd's take on the character in the two feature films. Ex-wrestler John DeSantis is a cookie-cutter version of Lurch,



In THE CROW: STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN, Mark Dacascos manages to make the role of Eric Draven his own, despite a strong resemblance to Brandon Lee.

lacking the brutish charms of either Ted Cassidy or Carel Struycken, and Steven Fox is a capable Thing. (Okay, what the hell else am I going to say about someone who plays a disembodied hand, huh?) Wednesday (Nicole Fugere) and Pugsley (Brody Smith) are patterned after their darker counterparts from the two films, with Fugere valiantly trying to out-creep young Ricci, but not quite pulling it off. Betty Phillips is the latest Granny Frump (a.k.a. Grandmama), a sometimes thankless role that has seen everyone from Carol Kane to Alice Ghostley taking a crack at it in recent years. The cast seems capable, and the production values aren't as cheap as the dreadful direct-to-video predecessor. Thankfully, it's not nearly as insulting to fans as that late-'80s fiasco, THE MUNSTERS TODAY.

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the series is getting used to seeing the characters in color. THE ADDAMS FAMILY and ADDAMS FAMILY VALUES had a certain monochromatic sensibility to their cinematography, but the series is awash in bright hues. Harvie is liberally doused in whitewash, while Roberds and DeSantis each sport ash-gray makeups, almost acknowledging that the characters should be in black and white. If it continues to steal the best elements of the original

'60s TV series and the two films, THE NEW ADDAMS FAMILY could be a good candidate for your latest TV guilty pleasure.

Okay, so it must've seemed like a great idea to base a Saturday morning cartoon series on Tri-Star's GODZILLA, right up until the moment the film was blasted by critics and audiences alike. Then again, most ten-year-olds actually liked the film and bought the toys (the ones that aren't still collecting dust on the shelves, anyway), so this Fall saw the debut of GODZILLA: THE SERIES (9:00 AM ET, Saturdays) on Fox. The first episode actually picked up with the giant, irradiated lizard dying on the Brooklyn Bridge, then had biotransformations expert Nick Tatopoulos (voiced by BEVERLY HILLS 90210's Ian Ziering) finding the lone, remaining egg at Godzilla's Madison Square Garden nest. The egg hatches, the Godzilla hatchling imprints on Nick as its mother, but it then flees into the Hudson River as the military closes in. A few weeks later, the 80-foot pup sniffs Nick out at his Staten Island headquarters. Nick decides to try and study the lil' mutant, and convince the Military that the beast is tame after it fights another mutant creature. Nick and his team of nuclear dogooders are now flying all over the planet, as more monsters created by pollution and nuclear radiation

start popping up. From giant Jamaican cockroaches to oversized honeybees, Nick and the soon fully-grown Godzilla are mankind's first line of defense against the aberrations that we've created. If all of this sounds a tad familiar, you either remember the Hanna-Barbera GODZILLA cartoon from the '70s, or have caught the reruns on Cartoon Network. At least there's no blasted Godzooky this time, and the monster battles are pretty nifty (film effects designer Patrick Tatopoulos is on hand to create all of Godzilla's new sparring partners). This is a fairly harmless diversion for anyone suffering from *daikaiju* withdrawal.

THE CROW: STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN (syndicated; check local listings) casts Mark Dacascos (DOUBLE DRAGON) in place of the late Brandon Lee as Eric Draven, a young musician who, along with his girlfriend, Shelly (Sabine Karsenti), is brutally murdered. Sticking to the mythology originally created in graphic novel by James O'Barr and the '94 film, Draven's soul is brought back to the land of the living by a crow. His body resurrected but not fully alive, Draven seeks to avenge the murders and be reunited with Shelly in the afterlife. In the series, Draven remains earthbound, forever seeking a way to be redeemed. Shelly is also seeking to guide Eric back to her, a ghostly presence sometimes seen but more often only felt by Eric. The setting has been changed to fictional Port Columbia instead of the film's depressing Detroit setting, although the series is shot in Vancouver (hey, they had an opening after THE X-FILES left for L.A.). The show does manage to capture some of the intensity and atmosphere of the first film, but the darker aspects have been toned down to meet broadcast standards. Dacascos is a talented enough actor to make Draven his own, despite the fact that he's almost an exact physical double for Lee. There are slight changes in the mythology—Draven morphs into the pale, hollow-eyed Crow persona instead of applying makeup, and he can see through the eyes of his winged escort *a la* THE BEASTMASTER. The plots contain a continuing story arc, as Eric



tries to learn more about why he's still not at rest, and just what his powers are (he can't be killed because he's already dead, but his strength seems supernaturally enhanced when he's battling the baddies). The episodes I've watched have had good stories and decent production values, and are a little more accessible than such cultish shows as **HIGHLANDER** and **HERCULES**. □

## VIDEO FILE

continued from page 51

merely exhibited simple technical competency and rudimentary storytelling technique. The process of sorting through the dozens of offerings that lacked even those basic qualities was a painful one, and many times I thought of giving up the effort to monitor what I had come to term "Movie Outlaws."

While most "Outlaw" movies remain pretty close to unwatchable, the last few years have seen an increase in the number of reasonably well-done efforts. This kind of growth in the "Outlaw" phenomena greatly accelerated in 1998. If one can ignore its shot-on-video origins, Todd Norris' **THE PARANORMAL**, from Englewood Entertainment, is better than 95% of the year's DTV product, no matter what the source.

Director Norris, who also wrote the movie and portrays the male lead, has crafted a low-key, wryly amusing tale of a paranormal researcher investigating what seems to be a haunted movie theater. Ultimately, we learn it isn't the theater that is inhabited by supernatural forces but rather the film being shown, a gore opus called **Z IS FOR ZOMBIE**. **SCREAM** was certainly an inspiration here, as Norris manages to spoof the zombie genre, pay homage to it, and deliver a dandy little film capable of standing on its own, even if you are unaware of these other qualities. Intriguing, amusing, and even scary at times, this is the first "Outlaw" effort that could get the Gus Van Sant remake treatment and emerge the equal of the winners in any of the other categories. A remarkable achievement, to say the least.

Pleasant as it is to recommend all the films above, I harbor no delusions that DTV has crossed a threshold and that quality efforts will become the norm. DTV sales are faltering while most video stores and their customers become increasingly reliant on theatrical hits only. In addition, the

sad state of the theatrical business, which no longer has room for even a good low-budget film, has forced filmmakers to accept minimal money for direct-to-video release that would have played in theaters ten years ago. The simple truth is that a DTV production company will make just as much money from the sale of a cheap, stupid, exploitative piece of junk, as they will from an imaginative, well-crafted and effective film that, because of the presence of those very qualities, probably cost a good deal more. I suspect that by next year, crap will have again become the dominant force in the DTV world, and I will once more be asking myself why I watch this stuff. But hey, I least I got one good year. □

## JONATHAN FRAKES

continued from page 36

about to go back and finish another season of that show," he said. "It's a great gig. I go in all day and do two or three shows, it's fabulous."

Additionally, Frakes production company has two shows that he's producing. One is for Fox called **ROSWELL HIGH**, "Which says it all. It's sort of a black comedy," said Frakes. "I was actually going to direct. Six kids in high school, three of them just happen to be aliens." Frakes is also producing a movie-of-the-week at UPN called **WAITING ON AN ANGEL**, which, he says, "is like **GHOST**. A high school kid dies and comes back as a ghost."

Frakes has optioned the rights to the book *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*. He also hopes to make **NOBLE FATHER** with Arnold Schwarzenegger, and **RACING IN THE STREETS**, which he says, "is a crime, godfather, drama, cops, New York, bad guys. Then maybe I'll get to do my Anne Tyler books. That's what I'd like to do, something where all the actors have pockets in their pants and no spaceships."

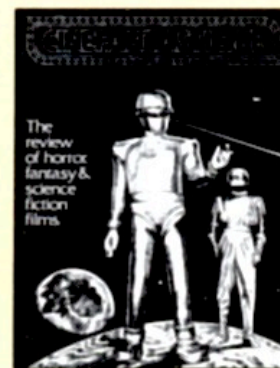
Frakes expects that he will be typecast for a time as an action director, but hopes to follow in the footsteps of Leonard Nimoy. "It's inevitable," he said. "I'd love to do a romantic comedy. People will say, 'How can he possibly do that?' and then I could take little moments from [INSURRECTION]; I could string together 20 comic beats from this movie and say, 'Here's how.' I'm trying. I'd love to follow that trek, but he [Nimoy] waited two years. I'll be lucky to follow that, and in the

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Liam Neeson plays Qui-Gon Jinn in STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM EMPIRE, Obi-Wan Kenobi's mentor who holds a seat on the Jedi council along with Yoda.

meantime, I'll be happy to do TOTAL RECALL.

"I'm contracted to do TOTAL RECALL 2. [Arnold]'s signed depending on what his availability is. Ron Shusett's script is in, and it's huge. It's actually more character driven than some, with a lot of Hauser and Quaid. Hauser's in the movie for five or ten scenes, and then Quaid overtakes him. It's got that same kind of mental turmoil as the first one. I can't imagine this script for less than \$100 million, but they, Dimension, paid for the rights from Carolco." □

## GEORGE LUCAS

continued from page 32

re-combined. Characters can be added or deleted from scenes, and textures and colors can be changed with the stoke of a keyboard. And by contracting actors for a short period of re-takes, Lucas can go back and add scenes he feels are missing, after he has assembled his first rough cut. According to Lucas, everything about digital is different from traditional filmmaking. "It's more like animation," he said. "You are storyboarding, writing, shooting, and editing all at the same time. I'm able to add things and change things much more readily. About 40% of this movie will be animated."

Interestingly enough, as in fully animated movies, Lucas may eventually want to eliminate actors altogether. As Mark Hamill once noted, "If there were a way to make movies without actors, I have a sneaking suspicion that George would do it." Of course, although it may be fairly easy to create non-human characters, like R2-D2 and C3-PO in the computer, creating digital humans is not something that can be accomplished in the foreseeable future. But Lucas noted that "the dinosaurs created in JURASSIC PARK seemed very real, and we are just about able to create human

beings as real. Some of the characters in THE PHANTOM MENACE will be digital characters, but they're all creatures. I only use digital technology to create something that I can't get actors to do. Actors are still the best way to portray people." Among the digital creations for THE PHANTOM MENACE, are a fleet of Battle Droids, and a humorous sidekick character named Jar Jar who helps the Jedi in their fight against Senator Palpatine.

If Lucas elects to create digital humans for the final three STAR WARS episodes (7, 8 and 9), it would certainly mean a tremendous savings in star salaries. Characters like Han Solo would require no \$20 million salary for Harrison Ford. Lucas, however, would still presumably need a cast to record the vocal tracks. □

## RICK BERMAN

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It was the only syndicated show of any success on television, first-run syndication. There are dozens of those now. STAR TREK is now in competition with all those shows, and it's also in competition with other STAR TREK shows. We're producing a ninth movie. I think we, meaning Paramount and myself to some degree, have to be very vigilant and careful not to

overexploit it, and I think it can be overexploited. I think that one can take too many trips to the well, and I think it is important not to force too many eggs out of the golden goose."

To that end, Berman explained that there are no new TREK series in development and that DEEP SPACE NINE will end with its current season. However, he also added, "I can't believe that another television series will not be developed at some point. I am hoping that is later than sooner just to give a little breathing room."

Under Berman's leadership, the TREK shows have brought in spiritual and New Age elements that would have been an anathema to secular humanist Roddenberry. As Berman observed, "Gene was a very aspirational character. I once had the misfortune of sitting next to him at a Roman Catholic wedding, and oh boy, you can't imagine how much grumbling came out of him during the whole process."

"I think that there has been no conscious attempt at spiritualism on the show. I think maybe it's simply that when stories are submitted, or when stories are developed that have elements to them that might be seen as spiritual or New Age, I am less likely to reject them out of hand than Gene was, as opposed to my being a person that is seeking them out."

According to Berman, there are no definite plans yet for another STAR TREK film, though Patrick Stewart has already indicated that he would prefer a three year break between movies rather than a two year one and is developing an idea for a story with Brent Spiner that he has not presented as yet. Regarding the prospect of DEEP SPACE NINE movies, Berman commented, "The NEXT GENERATION group, I certainly think, has some more films in them. This is an immensely popular group of characters, and I think as long as Patrick and Brent and the others are willing to keep doing these movies [they will continue]. The

original STAR TREK series did six, and we've only done three.

"As to DEEP SPACE NINE or VOYAGER, one thing nobody asks about is whether one could create a STAR TREK movie that didn't have to do with any of these series. These are all possibilities, and I can happily tell you that none of them have been discussed yet, but I am sure they will be discussed in the very near future, as well as the potential for other television series. That won't happen in the fall, but it may and probably will happen at some point in the next couple of years."

In the meantime, Berman commented, "I'm looking forward to the fact that when DEEP SPACE NINE ends production sometime in April, that I'll be able to focus, at least for a while, on one series. I think that working in story development on the shows is something that I get more pleasure out of, and the more things that I'm involved in, the more difficulty there is to take the time to do that. So that's something that I'm looking forward to. I think VOYAGER this season has been terrific, I've been very pleased with it, and hopefully it will have two more years after this year just like the other shows have." □

## UNIVERSAL HORROR

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THE WOLFMAN is a bit overrated (too many repetitions of famous lines like "even a man who is pure in heart" and "the way you walked..."), although I do find FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLFMAN to be entertaining if preposterous fun. The studio eventually squandered its legacy with countless sequels and rehashes in the '40s (represented here by HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN), but that first half decade, from 1931 to 1936, resulted in a handful of great films that stand the test of time. They may lack the robust energy of the Technicolor Hammer horrors many of us remember from a later era, but the Universal films, in the days before the production code toned down movies, touch on dark and troubling ideas with an occasional flash of perversity that are still fascinating to behold. □

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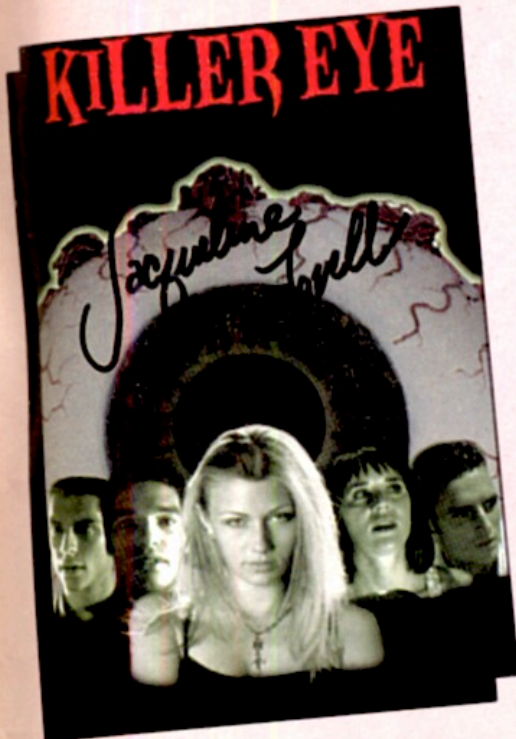


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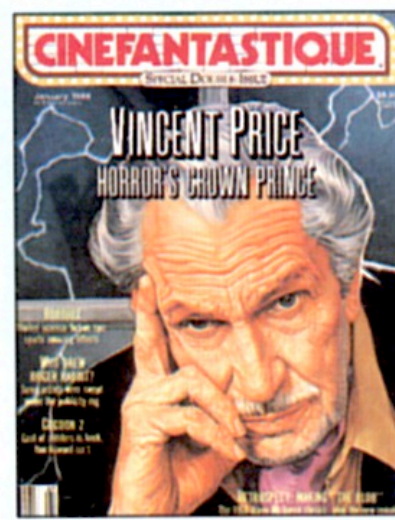
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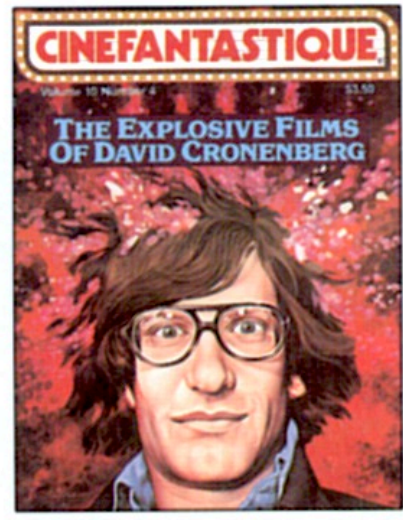
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